

Matt. Lambert's Little Catherine.

BY SOUTHWORTH SHELLEY.

"And a little child shall lead them."

IT was past the ides of April, and day was closing in. It had been spring in the morning, autumn at noon, and was winter now, this bleak November day. The wind, which swept through Maiden Lane in tempestuous gusts, was filled with tossing and gyrating snow-flakes, that could be but dimly seen through the dingy windows of the counting room of Snaggs & Co., publishers and book-binders.

Snaggs & Co. was a solid firm from 'way back. No one had ever been found who was able to say when they had had a beginning, but it was positively known that they had occupied the same quarters when Maiden Lane was no thoroughfare, or indeed little more than a cow-path. Years and years before the inquisitive little street took it into its head to run straight through Trinity Churchyard, and was promptly and ignominiously sat down upon and killed by that powerful and fabulously wealthy corporation.

Indeed, the firm had always been shrouded in such mystery and uncertainty, and the proprietors had surrounded themselves with such an impenetrable atmosphere of seclusion, that the belief had gone forth that Snaggs was no less a personage than the Wandering Jew, or some other equally mysterious individual, and "Co." a certain gentleman but rarely mentioned in polite society, and seen there never at all.

But there was one man who could have told the world differently, had he been so disposed. To him "Co.," whom he knew to be dead and buried, was as impersonal as to the rest of the world, while Snaggs, whom he knew to be very much alive, was so important a factor in his own life, as well as the lives of those most nearly connected to him, that it was a matter of daily concern not to arouse the choler of the irascible old man, or fall into any of the many traps set for him.

In a corner of the counting-room, farthest from the fire, a narrow cell was partitioned off; so narrow that it was

unpleasantly suggestive of a crypt, and without any great stretch of fancy one could readily understand the manner in which the passive occupant was to be shoved into the contracted and comfortless quarters. When, however, you went up the two steps leading through the door of the cell, you were disposed to smile at what you saw; for, instead of a corpse, there was a living man standing before a battered desk, which, in turn, stood before a window, looking out on Maiden Lane.

And this was the man, Matthias Lambert by name, to whom Snaggs was personal in the highest degree; for it was a rule of the house, and always had been, time out of mind, that no man employed inside its walls should marry, on pain of instant dismissal. Yet this thing Matt. Lambert had done, and though for reasons known only to himself, Snaggs had retained his book-keeper, he set him up as a target, at which all his whistling, poisoned arrows were aimed, till many, many were the times that poor Matt. would have accepted starvation rather than live in such an atmosphere of vituperation and sulphurous fumes.

Only there were the wife and child.

Matt. Lambert thought of these as he chased up and down six columns of figures for an error of twenty-five cents in the balance, without finding it; thought of them with an affection bordering on pain, as he muttered:

"Nine and eight are seventeen, and five are twenty-two, and three are twenty-five, and seven are thirty-three—what the deuce! Nine and eight are seventeen, and five are twenty-two, and three are twenty-five, and seven are thirty—thirty—poor baby, poor little kitten, it's too bad, too bad!"

He ceased for a moment to search for the delinquent quarter of a hundred cents—so insignificant in itself, so potent to kick up a row with Snaggs & Co.—to look out of the window at the whirling snow.

When he lifted his head you saw at

once that he was one of those old young men one meets so often nowadays.

Yet, looking closer at the face, with its open and ingenuous expression, to which much was added by a pair of exceptionally fine hazel eyes, you would have been willing to wager that the appearance of age was not the result of dissipation, fast living, or "burning the candle at both ends," but rather that too much thinking, added to premature care, had worn the two vertical lines between the brows and sprinkled the hair about the temples with grey.

He was certainly not over thirty, but as you looked at him from behind, bent over his books and papers, or caught a glimpse of the profile as he directed his gaze to the storm outside, you would surely have added another decade to his years.

Though Snaggs & Co. meant daily bread, and fuel, and clothing, and doctor bills, with sparse luxuries and an occasional and grudgingly granted holiday to Matt. Lambert, he seemed to have forgotten their existence, as he stared out of the grimy window, against which the snow-flakes beat, muttering under his breath :

"Poor little kitten, poor little kitten."

The words were inaudible even inside his cell-like apartment, and so could not possibly have been heard above the noise of the rattling windows, across the twenty feet of space that separated Matt. Lambert and the genial Snaggs.

Yet the sinister knowledge that his book-keeper and factotum was not diligently investigating the whereabouts of the mysteriously missing pence was conveyed by some occult power to the brain of Snaggs, whose voice rising above the storm in jarring staccato, flung these words across space and partition :

"If you'll just attend to the business of balancing that account Lambert, I'll be devilish glad to take it."

The book-keeper's left hand clinched and the vertical lines in his forehead deepened, but he said nothing, and his eyes dropped to the six columns of figures which the pen in his right hand began to run up.

"Do you hear in there?" snapped Snaggs.

Silence followed till the scratching pen had made six memorandums on a scrap of paper and the footing of the columns had been altered one single cent. Then he took some loose change from his pocket, counted out twenty-four cents in his hand, replaced the rest, and with the words, "I am coming," went down the two steps from his vault and crossed over to his employer.

"I found an error of but one cent, sir, but I have balanced the account," he said, and laid a paper and the twenty-four cents on the green baize desk.

Snaggs separated the pieces with his bony finger, counting them over with a glance; then he swept them with his right hand into the left and coolly dropped them into his trousers' pocket.

"So much," he said, with a snarl, "for carelessness. There is a mistake farther back."

"No, sir, there is no mistake. I have taken hours to look up that twenty-five cents. I found one of them on the last page. The error does not lie with me, anyhow it is rectified and the account balanced, is not that sufficient?"

For a wonder Snaggs made no reply, and the book-keeper waited respectfully, until in a lull of the wind there came the sound of a clock up Maiden Lane, striking the quarters, followed by the hour.

"If you please, Mr. Snaggs," began the man with evident hesitation, "I would very much like to have ——"

At the very first word the old man had looked up at Matt. Lambert with suspicion in his coal-black eyes, but when he got so far in whatever request he was about to make, Snaggs burst forth irascibly :

"No, sir, can't think of it; can't overstep the rules of the house for any of its employees. There never has been and never will be but one pay day in this concern."

"But I am not asking to be paid. What I wish to ask for, is a day off, a holiday!"

"The deuce! I take no holidays; if I did, things would go to the devil. What do you want with a holiday?"

"It is the anniversary of the marriage as well as the birth of both my wife and little daughter, and we have thought of celebrating the triple event in a quiet way."

"Bosh!" snorted Snaggs, while his eyes seemed to give off sparks back of his spectacles. "All bosh—this thing of celebrating wedding and birthday anniversaries. Better if there were no weddings, consequently there'd be no birthdays to keep. You'd a deal better be putting the wherewithal to buy bread in your pocket, instead of spending so much in folly."

"People think differently upon these points, sir. Moreover, I can make the time up by a week's over-hours; and tomorrow is Saturday."

He stood quietly waiting, yet with a look of anxiety in the handsome hazel eyes that was not lost upon his employer, who kept stabbing the besmeared cork inkstand with a rusty pen, while every feature of his wrinkled face seemed to harden and set, and he inwardly gloated over his power to add to or take from the pleasures of this man's life. He was loath to yield; some devil of the past shouting into one ear:

"Refuse! Wring his heart! Keep him at his desk! Remember the past!"

While into the other ear a flute-like voice whispered: "Forget; forgive; give, and it shall be given unto you."

Suddenly he lifted his hand to a level with his shoulder, took aim, and sent the missile flying at the inkstand. As the rusty nib buried itself in the cork, and the holder swayed back and forth for an instant, he turned his glowing eyes upon Matt. Lambert's face and said fiercely:

"Curse it! Take the day, get out of it what you can; but see that I lose nothing by the folly of your wedding and birthday anniversaries."

"You shall not, sir," answered Matt. Lambert, moving back quickly to his crypt, from which he presently emerged with his hat and overcoat on, and locking the door, put the key in his pocket and went out with a "Good evening, Mr. Snaggs," which that gentleman did not see fit to notice.

In the rear of the building a steam whistle blew shrilly; following that, came the sob and throb of stopping machinery, then the sound of slamming doors, and the tramp of many feet down the stairs and halls; then silence.

Then Snaggs might have been seen to

cross the counting-room, lock the door, come back again to his desk and drop into his chair in an inert and powerless way.

"So it's the anniversary of your wedding day, and the birthday of your wife and child, is it, Matt. Lambert?" he said, as if speaking to his book-keeper. "It's the sixteenth of November, and the anniversary of more than your family happiness, if I remember rightly," he continued bitterly.

"You wouldn't think it, Matt. Lambert, but it's the anniversary of my wedding day also, and of my wife's death, and my daughter's birthday, as well as the anniversary that marks the day she chose to break her father's heart and change him into a bitter and cynical old man, by running away with that poor devil of a lover of hers, simply to escape marrying my rich partner.

"Oh, it's a multiplicity of anniversaries, is this—the sixteenth day of November. Curse it!"

He tore off his spectacles and flung them on the desk with a violence that shattered one lens; but he took no heed, running his bony fingers through his bushy grey locks and literally tearing them out by the roots, in the extremity of his misery. He got up and walked the floor, raging like a lion; a magnificent specimen of a man, in whom all the gifts and forces of mental and physical life had been lavishly cast; a man of strong passions and fierce, indomitable will, still—untamed; with extreme capacities for happiness and suffering, despite his sixty years.

He paced back and forth, lashing himself to fury by the bitterness of reminiscence and introspection, revealing the nature of his thoughts by more than one emphatic "Curse it," till the tide of passion having reached the flood began to subside, and gave place to calmer, tenderer thoughts and actions.

"Ah, Catherine, my girl, behold your work," he said, suddenly stopping, and stretching out his arms, as to some visible creature, "see the transformation your disobedience and ingratitude have wrought in the father you might have bound with one silken tress of your hair to your will. Why not have trusted me, child? I

would not have been implacable; but to deceive me till the last; to steal away to the arms of who knows what low-born lover; to betray my love; to impeach my honor; to transform a loving, happy father into a Diogenes; to keep silence all these years."

He stood with arms extended and gleaming eyes, looking into space; then lowering his voice, as if she to whom his words were addressed stood face to face with him, continued:

"But I have been to blame, Catherine, I have been implacable, in that I have never sought to find you."

Then, with sudden resolution, emphasized by that vehemence which characterized every act of the man, he said:

"It is not too late yet, Joel Snaggs, to undo the work of years. Ah, Matt. Lambert, if it were only you my child had chosen; poor but proud, upright and ingenuous, the pill would not be so bitter. After all, what does existence amount to without my child? Well, let to-morrow come, with its aftermath of anniversaries; keep yours, Matt. Lambert, and I'll keep mine, and start anew from thence."

And Matt. Lambert trudged through the driving storm, his great, tender heart sorrowful for his little child, because this unlooked for change of weather would prevent the carrying out of their plans for the celebration of the triple anniversary. As he turned into the street near his own home, a tiny creature in a Mother Hubbard water-proof, with the hood drawn over the shining head, and little feet shod with over-shoes, came skimming toward him like a swallow.

The man's pace was quickened, and his face transfigured as she came on, and long before she reached him his arms were ready and caught her up even before she stopped.

Just to see the love in his eyes, as the little creature put her arms about his neck and nestled her velvet cheek against his own, was worth going a day's journey; just to hear her pretty prattle as she told how she and mamma had re-planned to keep the day, was worth a pilgrimage to Mecca; but to have had a single one of the score of kisses her rosebud mouth pressed upon his with such sweet aban-

donment of love, would have been infinite compensation for any privation and an incentive to overcome all obstacles in the way of her happiness.

And so thought Matt. Lambert as he bore his baby, his kitten, his little Catherine up the steps to his own modest abode.

So Matt Lambert's trio of anniversaries were kept, to little Catherine's delight, at the Museum of Natural History, with a tidy little dinner at the Park restaurant, and the after ecstasy of driving alone a spirited team of bronze-horned goats up and down the mall; the whole lovely day ending with an evening at the theatre, from whence little Kitten went home in such a bewilderment of bliss that all night long fairies and wood nymphs danced over the counterpane, and a comical little Puck turned summersaults and posed on the foot-board of her cot. While Joel Snaggs, not so far away after all, had kept *his* anniversaries in loneliness and self-reproach for the last time.

One person there was whose thoughts never left the austere old man throughout that day of quiet happiness, and that person was Matthias Lambert's wife. He had told her as gently as he could with what reluctance Snaggs had granted the holiday, softening the bitter words and giving the man full benefit of the sublime pity and charity of his own great nature. But when she had laid her hands in his, and looking into his pitiful hazel eyes with her brimming blue ones, had asked in a whisper:

"Has the time come, Matt.?" he had been compelled to answer, with a sorrowful shake of the head:

"Not yet, my darling."

So winter passed, with the November day standing out like a shrine, a little apart from the dusty highway, at which they had stopped to rest and make an offering of flowers, and June had come in with her wealth of sunshine and roses.

Matt. Lambert in his cell in the counting-room had made up the day with over-hours, serving his employer with honest singleness of purpose, absorbed in not only the strict performance of appointed duties, but anticipating the wants of Snaggs, whose manner had altered, and whose words had lost that Damascus edge

that had characterized them prior to that day of days; while the men at the head of each department, who alone came into contact with the proprietor, felt that some great change, some softening influence, was at work on Snaggs & Co.

Matt. noticed, too, with wonder, that where it had been an exception to see the chair before the old man's desk vacant, he found it often so now when he came down the steps from his vault to ask for instructions, or give information upon some important piece of business.

Whenever the day was especially bright this was almost sure to be the case; and what was strangest of all, Joel Snaggs was irritable if detained about his own affairs, frequently leaving the counting-room, where he had almost buried himself for years, with such cautious silence that often Matt. came out of his cell with a handful of papers and was half across the intervening space before he noticed that Snagg's desk was in disorder and his swivel-chair empty.

The book-keeper's practical mind was puzzled to find a solution for this astonishing change; for the money market was easy, credit good, and never in all the years of his connection with the firm of Snaggs & Co. had business been so prosperous or the outlook so fair. It could be none of these things, therefore, that took Snaggs away, or accounted for these unseemly absences during business hours.

But if Matt. Lambert could have followed his employer he would have been still more astonished in seeing that he always went in the same direction, always turned at length into the same quiet street, and always stopped to speak to a fairy creature with shining chestnut hair and heavenly eyes of blue, who slipped her tiny hand confidingly in his and walked a little way up the street, chattering gaily, while Snaggs, the most heartless, soulless and bitter of cynics, turned as she left him to run back and stood watching the little creature with gleaming eyes till she reached her own door in safety.

More astonished still would Matt. have been could he have seen the man's face when she asked him one day with pretty naivete:

"Are you anybody's grandpa?" and

then, without waiting for an answer, the sweet little voice dropping into sorrowful accents:

"Bessie Dunn has such a nice grandpa. I wish I had a real grandpa too."

"A real grandpa, little one? What is a real grandpa?"

"Oh, one you can see and love, and take walks with in the park."

"And haven't you a grandpa, dear?" asked Joel Snaggs, regarding the lovely upturned face with hungry eyes.

"Yes, sir; but not a real one."

"What kind of a grandpa have you, then, my pretty one?"

"I don't know, he is way off," she said, with a sorrowful shake of her head.

"But will he not come home sometime?" asked Snaggs.

"Mamma says maybe he will, but I guess not, 'cause I'm five years old and he never came to see me yet," answered the child.

"Will you tell me your name, dear?" asked Matt. Lambert's employer as they reached the corner and stopped as usual.

"Oh yes! It is Catherine Snaggs Lambert," answered the unconscious babe, patting the bony hand that held her little dimpled one.

"*Catherine Snaggs Lambert!*" gasped Joel Snaggs, while all his features worked convulsively.

Then he suddenly bent and lifted the child in his arms and with all his starved soul looking through his humid eyes into her celestial blue ones, and asked hoarsely:

"Will you let me be your really grandpa, dear?"

"Oh yes, oh yes," she cried, delightedly laying a dimpled hand on either wrinkled cheek.

"Then kiss me, Catherine, and run back to mamma," he said. And Matt. Lambert's little Kitten had pressed her rosebud mouth against old Snaggs' grey moustache, and, slipping from his arms, gone skimming like a swallow up the street, whilst he stood still and watched her; and such a swell of memories came rolling in upon his soul that no power on earth could have drawn his feet again that day toward the counting-room of Snaggs & Co. in Maiden Lane. But sweetest and best and strangest thing of all the beautiful finale to all the wonderful

denouement of which Matt. Lambert's anniversaries had been the cause; the hour when Snaggs had entered, locked the door and crossing the counting-room with bounding step, entered his book-keeper's cell and laying his hand upon his arm, said with a simulation of ferocity:

"Matt. Lambert, I have found you out!"

And when the man had turned, white and trembling, to look at his employer, how Snaggs' eyes had betrayed him after all, and the two men had grasped each other's hands and shaken them until they ached; the strange tenderness in old Snaggs' voice as he told how he had come upon little Catherine one day when he was wandering aimlessly to ease the aching of his heart; how something in the little creature's face brought back such vivid memories of his only child, that he had been drawn again and yet again to look upon the babe, till all her sweet confiding little ways had broken the crust of bitterness in which his soul had been encased for years, and when God had seen that he was ripe for revelation, the child had said, "My name is Catherine Snaggs Lambert."

"Matt. Lambert," old Snaggs had said, with choking voice, taking off his spectacles to polish them, "put on your hat and take me now to see my child." And the book-keeper had slammed his ledgers into the safe, snatched his hat like a school-boy from its hook, locked the door of his vault, and gone out arm in arm with Snaggs, which being seen by one of the foremen, had so staggered the man that he was found leaning against the door incapable of speech, till revived by a timely dose of Bourbon straight and strong.

And when they came at length to Matt. Lambert's happy home, and the door was opened by the tidy little maid, and little Catherine, catching sight of Snaggs, went skimming down the hall, crying:

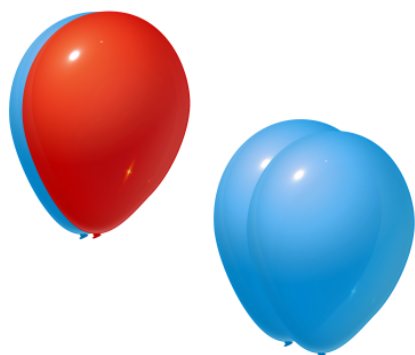
"Oh, mamma, here's my real grandpa come!"

And she, the wife and daughter, who had fled because she loved her father's poor, but noble book-keeper more than his rich, but sordid partner, came; fair and beautiful, but looking first at her husband, asked with trembling lips: "Has the time come, Matt?"

"The time is here, my darling," he said, and with a cry she cast herself into the open arms of Snaggs, who held her fast, and bent his grey head and laid his cheek against hers, whispering:

"Catherine, my Catherine, forgive me, dear."

Ah, that my pen could portray the picture as I see it all; the re-uniting of the broken chain of love by the golden link of childhood; the gradual transformation of the hardened cynic; the pride with which he introduced Matt. Lambert as "my son-in-law and partner, sir," installed his daughter mistress of his home; did his best to spoil little Catherine, and in the exuberance of his joy did what he was never known to do before, became acquainted with his employees, and sought to establish a feeling of friendliness and good-fellowship among them, one and all; last, if I but had the skill to paint with facile pen all the sixteenth day of November will hold for that quartette of happy hearts henceforth so long as life may last, then, indeed, would I be content.



The Sepulchral Vase.

BY ANNIE MARIA BARNES.

IT certainly was a queer wedding present to select, but then I well knew my friend's fondness for the odd and antique. Indeed, he had a perfect passion for collecting singular bits of pottery, the more singular the better—vases, urns, lachrymatories, and anything else of the kind that came in his way.

That the bride elect herself might not feel so highly pleased or flattered by the grimness of my selection never once entered my head. My thoughts on the subject were all with my friend, who had been as a brother to me ever since the death of both parents had left me without a near relative in the world.

His letter, informing me of his prospective marriage and urging me to return at once so as to participate, had reached me only that morning in the little foreign town, whither I had gone to escape the noise and dust of the larger cities.

It was while awaiting the sailing of the steamer in L—— that I thought of the bridal present.

A queer little shop near the wharf, with its windows filled with curiosities of every description, soon attracted my attention, and it was there that, after rummaging for a half hour or more through all manner of odd and curious bric-a-brac, I finally stumbled upon the sepulchral vase, for by this name the dealer had specified it, though at first sight it seemed to have very little of a funeral-like appearance.

It was thousands of years old, he assured me, and had been taken from an ancient Egyptian tomb.

I thought the dealer acted very strangely in regard to the sale of the vase. It was by the merest accident I had stumbled upon it, concealed as it had been behind a hideous Hindoo idol. The moment my eyes rested upon it I recognized that it was exactly what I wanted. But I could in no way account for the singular behavior of my dealer, whose manner had grown strangely nervous and excited from the moment I had unearthed the vase. He assured me at first that it

was not for sale; again that it was already engaged.

In vain I offered him what I knew was a most extravagant price for it. Finally, after glancing at my watch and finding I had only a few moments in which to catch the steamer, I gave vent to my vexation in words. Instantly the manner of my dealer changed. He was now the anxious party.

"The Signor is then no resident here?" he questioned, hurriedly. "His intention is to take the steamer to his home on the other side of the great water?"

I assured him in the affirmative, and was on the point of hastening away when his voice again detained me:

"The Signor may then have the vase," and began wrapping it up ere I had time to reply.

Once within my state-room I sat down for a more extended examination of my treasure. It was truly a wonderful specimen of the potter's art, and the more I gazed at it the more I pictured to myself my friend's delight in its possession.

The substance of which it was formed was of a dark purplish black, having more the appearance of hardened rubber than of brittle clay. Indeed, as I threw my middle finger out from my thumb with some force against the side of the vase, it failed to give back the usual metallic ring, but instead a dull, thumping sound. The base was quadruple in form, and each corner ornamented with a pear-shaped projection some five inches in height. Each of these, in turn, was capped by the grim head of one of the four great deities of ancient Egypt, commonly called the four genii of the ament or Hades. All this my dealer had explained to me. Directly from the centre of the base rose a cylindrical figure, dome-shaped at the top and bearing aloft a grotesque form. I could set this down in my mind as no other than a bogie, though it was by no means hideous in appearance, but weird and fanciful to a degree to attract attention rather than to repel it.

The dealer had said to me that he really did not know the signification of this central figure, though a connoisseur in such things had informed him that it was doubtless intended as a likeness of the genius Hapi, "The Concealed." At the same time he admitted the possibility of a mistake, as that Egyptian tutelary divinity was oftenest represented with the head of a cynocephalous than otherwise.

It was truly a grotesque figure, that of the Hapi, a short thick-set body, long thin legs terminating in the claws of an animal, uncouth, disproportionate features, great staring, apparently blinking, eyes, and one arm thrown across the breast and stuck idiotically into the gaping mouth.

The head and body from the waist up were open, perfectly hollow and watertight, thus forming a receptacle. About the waist there was a serrated band, apparently of some hard, glass-like substance, though not brittle. From the waist down to the body's jointure with the legs was perhaps some six inches; from the waist to the top of the head about eight. Around the top of the cylindrical base upon which the Hapi rested were a number of hieroglyphics worked in alkaline glaze of a dark maroon color—an inscription, doubtless.

As we made an unusually quick voyage I had the satisfaction of arriving in A—— three days prior to the one set apart for my friend's wedding.

That night as he called at my boarding-place I was so filled with thoughts of the vase, and an impatience to witness his delight at beholding it, that I could not wait for the night of the happy event, but forthwith exhibited it to him on the spot.

His surprise and pleasure were even greater than I had anticipated. Indeed, so much was he fascinated with the vase, so rare and valuable a curiosity did he regard it, that nothing would do but that the bride-elect herself must have a look at it before the auspicious night.

They were going away immediately after the ceremony, he argued, and in the hurry and bustle attendant on their departure there would be neither the time nor the opportunity for Edith, his intended, to examine it as he wished her to do.

Of course, I could do naught else than yield to the wishes, and the next morning at ten o'clock was selected as the time I should call with him upon Miss Caverly, carrying the vase.

I had, I must confess, no small amount of curiosity in regard to the young lady who had, as it was quite plain to me, so unreservedly won the heart and the devotion of my noble friend. He had told me all there was to tell that night as we sat late over our pipes. Edith Caverly was an orphan, and had been raised by an aunt, who was the only near relative she had in the world with the exception of a grand-uncle on her father's side. This uncle lived near L——, the very point from which I had taken the steamer for home. He was rich and eccentric, and, beyond asking her over to spend some months with him during the spring and summer of the preceding year and sending the amount necessary to defray her traveling expenses, had never noticed his nièce in any other way. However, it was currently believed that he would remember her handsomely at his death. My friend, also, told me something else in regard to the property over which Gerard Caverly held undisputed sway.

Miss Caverly's great-grandfather had been twice married. By each union a son had been born to him with but five years difference in their ages. The elder, Miss Caverly's grandfather, had been dead these fifteen years or more; the younger was her grand-uncle, the present Gerard Caverly.

It was the old story of a diplomatic and determined step-mother—a disliked and defrauded step-child. How she ever accomplished it was known only to herself, but before either boy was of age a will had been made giving the large estates, everything, to the younger; a bare pittance to the older, scarcely enough to carry him through college. And this will remained unaltered up to the time of the old man's death, though there were rumors of another dated later and making an equal division. But as no trace of it could be found, the rumors soon died away. The younger came into undisputed possession; spent his money lavishly, but chiefly upon himself; developed into a morose, cynical old man without wife, children or

friends; while the elder crossed the ocean, grew up with a vigorous new country, and died honored and regretted with the weeping faces of dear ones about his bed.

Miss Caverly's father had been very much as her grandfather, manly, industrious, and beloved. But an unfortunate business venture had swept away his every dollar the very year his wife died, and he himself not long surviving this dual calamity, his orphan girl would thus, but for her mother's sister, have been left to buffet alone with the world. This aunt had truly supplied the place of a mother; and though her husband enjoyed only a moderate salary through a government appointment, she, nevertheless, lavished upon her niece the best gifts within her power.

And this was the young lady to whom my friend was engaged to be married, who, as he assured me with all a lover's blind idolatry, was "an angel," or to put it more moderately, "the best girl in the world."

The next morning promptly at ten, we were both seated in her aunt's modest, yet exceedingly tasty little parlor, awaiting her arrival. She did not detain us long. She came within five minutes, bringing with her all the freshness, brightness, and perfume of the fair spring morning we had left out of doors. Not grandly tall nor regally beautiful, neither *petite* nor fairy-like, but a lithe, medium-sized figure gracefully carried in every movement, a sweet, earnest face with character, decision, stamped all over it, and a voice it tingled one's veins to hear. No wonder my friend loved her. But for the troth I knew plighted between them I would have surrendered to her without reserve my own heart upon the spot. As it was, I could only admire chivalrously from a distance. But from that moment I was her devoted slave. Her manner, too, was most winning and cordial. I was the best friend of her betrothed; that was sufficient she assured me.

Gaily we chatted for a while, my admiration and respect increasing at every moment, when my friend introduced the subject of the sepulchral vase. I had brought it along much more carefully wrapped than when I had received it from the dealer's hands. It, therefore, took me some time

to remove the coverings. At the words "sepulchral vase," as uttered by my friend, I noticed that she started and grew pale, while her manner all through the unwrapping was exceedingly nervous and excited.

As the last fold dropped away, and I held the vase up for her inspection, I was considerably startled to hear her give utterance to a strange, gasping cry. The next moment she had darted towards me and grasped both slender hands about the grotesque figure of the Hapi. As she did so a cry sharper than the preceding one, and more decidedly a cry of pain, passed her lips. The next instant, as she withdrew her hand, I noticed that there was a stain of blood across the palm. She had wounded it with the sharp points of the serrated belt about the Hapi's waist.

With considerable alarm and concern my friend at once sprang to her side. His intention, evidently, was to gain possession of the wounded hand, and to unclasp the other from about the vase ere further damage was done. But as though divining his intention she suddenly swung her body around in front of him, and ere either of us knew what she was about, had seized the vase with both hands and darted from the room.

My friend stood staring at me stupidly for a few moments. Then with a quick exclamation of dismay he turned hastily in pursuit of her. That I was completely dumfounded by this singular behavior on the part of Miss Caverly can readily be surmised, as well as my grief and astonishment when my friend returned after some considerable delay, and I learned the true state of affairs. He was terribly excited and dreadfully worked up over the matter. The whole upshot of it was that Miss Caverly most emphatically declared that the vase belonged to her grand-uncle; that it was an old heirloom that had been in the family for years and years; had even figured in her great-grandfather's death-bed scene, and was at present valued by her uncle as none other of his treasures. Only that morning she had received a telegram from him announcing that the vase had been stolen, and begging her to send a description of it, which she knew perfectly, to police headquarters that it might be telegraphed all

over the country, as he had every reason to believe that the thief had escaped with it to America. She had intended to mention the matter to her betrothed during our morning call and ask his assistance. Indeed, she had been on the very point of it when I had uncovered the wrappings of the prospective bridal present, and stood there with the identical vase in my hands! It surely was enough to startle her out of all self-possession, even to call forth those sudden and hysterical actions that had accompanied the seizing and carrying away of the vase.

But the worst part of the whole business was that she believed me the thief, and would listen to neither reason nor remonstrance from my friend, who, as might be supposed, was bitterly indignant at her accusations. The consequence was they had had a quarrel, and my friend, in the heat of his wounded pride and indignation, had haughtily declared that unless she withdrew her unjust aspersions it must all be over between them. She, on her part, was equally as haughty and determined. Besides, as she firmly believed, she had right on her side. Thus the mingled sparks of two fiery tempers had sprung a perfect powder mine, which exploding had blown up both poor victims with it. And it but two days to the wedding, too, the trousseau arrived, the guests invited, and even the feast nearly all prepared!

It would never do in the world, I thought; something must be done. In vain I tried to reason with my friend. He must make some allowances I suggested, for the over-wrought state into which she had doubtless been thrown by the reception of the telegram and the request her uncle had made. Then the discovery of the vase right on top of it all, and in such a manner! It surely was enough to completely upset her. Wait until morning, I finally persuaded him, when she would have had time to think it all over and grow calmer. She would then be in a much more reasonable frame of mind, surely.

But the morning brought no change in Miss Caverly's position, towards me at least. Indeed, she seemed to have grown only the more bitter and unreasonable in her charges against me. My friend was

thoroughly out of patience, to say nothing of temper.

"I declare she is as foolish and inconsistent as a child, not to mention her hardness and injustice!" he declared with some heat. "I believe the miserable thing has completely bewitched her. She doesn't do anything but sit where she can see it and mutter over it all the time."

And so it seems as if it *had* cast some evil spell over her, that or something else.

The morning passed, the day was fast drawing to a close, when a happy thought struck me. While in the little shop at L., I had picked up from the counter a card containing the address and business of the dealer. I might need it for future reference, I thought. As I now recalled the circumstance, I went at once to my room and began searching for it in the pocket of the coat I had worn at the time. To my satisfaction I soon found it.

Ten minutes later I was seated in the pleasant parlor I so well remembered, and writing these words across one corner of the card: "LET THIS PLEAD FOR ME." The next moment I had placed it in the servant's hand with the direction to carry it direct to Miss Caverly.

She had barely had time to read it, I thought, when the door of the parlor, which was partially ajar, was thrown hastily open and Miss Caverly herself, tearful, sweet, but best of all penitent and appealing stood before me.

"Can you ever forgive me?" she cried in that exquisite, yet at this moment intensely vibrating voice I remembered so well. "I see it all now! That card has recalled me to my senses. Collona Trotti is the brother of a man in my uncle's employ who has for some time been under the shadow of my uncle's suspicions. Collona himself has long coveted the vase, and has more than once tried to purchase it from my uncle. Oh, how could I have wronged you so? and you Harry's best and dearest friend, too! But you do not know the state I have been in ever since the reception of my uncle's telegram. Oh, it was dreadful! I know the store he sets by the vase. Why, he can hardly bear it out of his sight! and I feel is at this moment in a

perfect fever of unrest in regard to it. He has declared time and again that he would go raving mad if it should be lost, and I believe would go to the ends of the earth in search of it. Why, he has even made us all promise to see that it is buried with him! I can't comprehend what there is in it to make him go on so about it. It is true it is a rare and unique curiosity and has been in the family ever since my great-grandfather was a young man. Why, will you believe it, my great-grandfather was the very same way about it as my uncle? He wouldn't let it out of his sight, only he never said anything in regard to its being buried with him. But when he was dying he kept asking and motioning for something. It was a long time ere they understood that it was the vase he wanted. When at last they got it to him he was so near gone he could do nothing but pick at the sharp-pointed belt about the Hapi's waist. It was certainly ominous that he should have cut his hand with it just as I did mine this morning. And I have been told that those who prepared his body for burial did not altogether take away the blood stains from his fingers."

With a little shudder Miss Caverly, who had been standing all this time, seated herself while she concluded:

"I have telegraphed my uncle that I have found the vase, and I am every moment expecting to hear from him."

The words had barely left her lips when a servant came through the open door with the well known manilla envelope of the telegraph company in his hand.

Miss Caverly gave a nervous little start as she opened it and glanced at the first line; then grew strangely white, finally vexed and flushed as she finished it, when she handed it to me. It was, of course, from her uncle. Immediately upon the reception of his niece's telegram announcing the discovery of the vase, he had started for A., although, as his message stated, suffering from a strange and complicated attack and really not able to travel. But his anxiety in regard to the vase and his impatience to have it once more within his possession had overcome all prudence. Even the warnings of his physicians had failed to stop him. But that they had not been without their

effect was evidenced in the lines of the message, wherein he entreated her that in case the worst should happen to him on the voyage, and his body, as usual in such cases, be consigned to the deep, she would immediately take passage for the spot, the location of which would be determined as near as possible by the captain of the ship on which he had sailed, and there consign to the waves the sepulchral vase.

In the meantime, he begged that she would not let it out of her sight, and that her marriage be postponed, as, in the event of his safe arrival, nothing would please him more than to be present.

This latter part, by the way, was what had called forth Miss Caverly's well-defined expression of vexation; for now, that we had become reconciled, the lover's quarrel was, of course, at an end, and the wedding would take place the following night, as heretofore arranged. Neither party, it seemed, had taken any step towards stopping the arrangements or notifying friends, each doubtless hoping against hope that the other would make the necessary concession. So, all that would have been necessary now, would have been to let things go on as programmed, but for this unexpected action on the part of the bride-elect's uncle.

At first Miss Caverly stoutly declared that she would not wait for her uncle; that he had no right to ask her to spoil everything by a postponement; that it was only a mere idle whim, a notion on his part that was unreasonable, to say the least; and that she ought not to be expected to throw everything and everybody out of gear simply to gratify a whimsical old man. My friend was of the same opinion. Besides his desire and impatience to call the sweet girl all his own was but natural. But the more cautious counsel of older heads finally prevailed. Edith had expectations from her uncle, her aunt, among others, suggested it would therefore be best to yield to his wishes.

On the twelfth day following the one set apart for the wedding, and just as we were all waiting with what degree of patience we could summon the arrival of Gerard Caverly, Miss Caverly was the recipient of a communication from the

captain of an European steamer that had just landed at Charleston. Said communication was to the effect that Gerard Caverly had taken passage with him at L.; that he had been in so prostrated a condition physically as to necessitate his being carried aboard the vessel; that he had continued to grow worse till on the fifth day out, at precisely 12 M., he had breathed his last.

But previous to the occurrence of this melancholy event he had sent for the captain, to whom he had, without reserve, revealed the motive that had led him to undertake the perilous voyage. He begged that his body might be kept at least thirty-six hours ere being consigned to the deep, and, upon that event, the captain would so take the bearings of the spot that something at least like its vicinity might afterwards be determined. He also asked that immediately upon the steamer's arrival at her port the captain would communicate with his niece, Miss Edith Caverly, enclosing a written message, that properly addressed and sealed, would be found in a compartment of his portmanteau. The captain would also please be so good as to notify her of the date he expected to begin his return voyage, so that she might take passage with him, expenses of which for herself and companion were paid by Caverly on the spot. The captain was then to bring her as near to the point at which his, Caverly's, body had been launched into the sea as could possibly be determined. As to the further course of his niece, that would be a matter of her own choice, and one in regard to which he had privately written her.

Such was the nature of the communication made to Miss Caverly by Captain Luke Harley of the steamship *Scotia*, taking care to add on his own part that he expected to set sail on the twenty-third of the month. The letter was dated the seventeenth and received the afternoon of the eighteenth. But five days, therefore, intervened. The first thing to receive attention was, of course, the wedding, as neither of the young people was of the mind to submit to longer delay. But on account of the death of Miss Caverly's uncle and the melancholy circumstances connected with

it, the marriage was a much quieter affair than at first intended.

I, who, in the meantime, had received through Captain Harley, acting under instructions from Gerard Caverly, the amount expended in purchase of the vase, was entreated by the newly-wedded pair to accompany them on their mission. Afterwards, as Harry suggested, we would go for a run on the Continent, as they had already arranged between themselves, visiting such places as I had been forced to miss through the hasty summons home.

The very evening of the day preceding our departure for Charleston there came a cablegram for Miss Caverly, or Mrs. Dolby, as she was now known. It was from a young friend of hers living in L., and threw no little consternation into our ranks, to say nothing of indignation. Immediately upon the announcement at his home of Gerard Caverly's death, through telegraphic communication with his solicitor, his will had been opened and read. To the extent of not so much as a single farthing had his niece been remembered, but to various charitable and art institutions, that were to perpetuate his name, every cent of his vast estates had been queathed.

"The mean old curmudgeon!" I exclaimed in my indignation, unburdening myself to Harry. "I would see him forty fathoms deep in a sea of seething, boiling, retributive breakers, that would dash his bones into a million fragments and make sausage-mill shreds of his tough old flesh, before I'd move one foot to carry out his maniacal request!"

"So I think and feel," declared Harry, "but there is no use arguing the point with Edith; she believes it her duty to go, since the expenses of the journey have been paid. Besides she looks upon it as an appeal from the dead, and as such to be sacredly regarded."

Six days out from our sailing point, at exactly half-past 3 o'clock in the afternoon, a group, consisting of Harry, Edith, Captain Harley and myself, stood upon the forward deck of the steamer *Scotia*, with eyes intently scanning the wide expanse of waters. Edith leaned upon the arm of her husband, pale, every nerve strung to a tension, yet outwardly calm and col-

lected. I was next to her, with the vase in my hands, awaiting a word from the captain, when I would at once place the uncouth piece of pottery in her hands to be sent upon its downward journey.

"Now!" exclaimed the captain, in low, intense tones, some moments later.

I held out the vase to Edith. She stretched forth her hands to receive it. But either the tension had relaxed and her nerves were again unstrung, or else I was careless. At any rate the vase slipped clear of either grasp and fell downward in the direction of the deck, but not upon the deck, however. Something arrested it in its fall and held it—the soft yet strong fringe of the light shawl which Harry had carefully wrapped about his wife's throat and shoulders. The fringe had become entangled in the serrated hand about the Hapi's waist.

I reached forth my hand and grasped the fringe, pulling as I did so, gently at first, then stronger as it continued to resist my efforts, though I did not pull very hard for fear of injuring the fabric. But, evidently, Edith did not set so great a store by it, for bending suddenly she gave the fringe a sharp, determined pull. Immediately thereon a strange thing happened. The band slipped downward from the Hapi's waist, disclosing an opening. We all four saw the opening, but Harry's quick eyes were the first to detect the gleam of paper within. With a hurried exclamation he thrust in his finger and thumb and immediately abstracted a closely folded packet. Unfolding it three sheets of fine linen paper, closely written and yellow with age, were exposed to view.

"The Last Will and Testament of Leonard Caverly," read Harry in concentrated tones, each syllable of which fell

with an indescribable effect upon our ears.

"My great-grandfather!" gasped Miss Caverly that was; then seemed for the moment bereft of further speech.

"Yes, dear, your great-grandfather," returned Harry, encircling her waist, "and I have here nothing more nor less than that later will he was long suspected to have made, giving an equal division of the property."

"Oh, do you—do you think," faltered poor Edith, with wide and wounded eyes, "that he—that he—he," essaying to point downward in the direction of the sea, "that *he* could have known of this?"

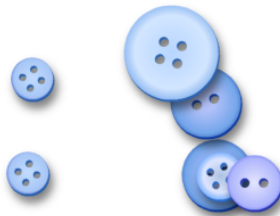
"He did not know it, I am confident, dear, or he would have destroyed the paper long ago. But he suspected it, as every action of his goes to show. O, long defrauded princess," handing her the paper as he speaks, "welcome to thine own."

"Hurrah!" I cried, waving my handkerchief like an animated union-jack about their heads; "but will you please tell me," indicating the vase, "what is to be done with this?"

"Pitch it overboard," as at first intended," suggested Harry, grimly; "he's welcome to what's left of it."

"But not before I have secured this as a memento," I declared, grasping as I spoke a huge iron pin that lay near and severing the Hapi close off at its juncture with the cylindrical base.

"We are considerably beyond the spot now," suggested the captain, "but, nevertheless," I cried, as Edith's white fingers let drop over the boat's side what was left of the sepulchral vase, "I feel that in some way, never mind how widely separated, these two will manage to come together."





The Fateful Opal.

BY GERTRUDE GREEN.

THE moonlight lies white on the field, and not even a breath stirs the shade of the trees, and yet I could swear as I sit here miles inland that I hear the eternal roar of the sea. For thirty years the sound has never left me, sleeping or waking, and at times I am almost crazed by its insistent clamor.

To-night an impulse which I can neither understand nor resist, compels me to write down the events which have made my life as dreary as the sound of waves that forever fills my ears.

Thirty years ago to-night, I was sitting alone in the library of an old country house in ——shire. The wind blew in from the sea whose continuous murmur mingled pleasantly with the happy reverie into which I had fallen. My pen had dropped idly from my hand, and the sheets of the letter I had been writing were stirred by the breeze that came in through the open window. As I look back upon this time, it seems to me the happiest period of my life, blest with youth, health, a fair prospect of rapidly attaining eminence in my chosen profession, and moreover, with the brightly dawning hope that she whom I loved, returned my passion.

From these dreams I was aroused by a cold breeze blowing in upon me, and I hastily arose and shut the window. Returning to the table to finish my letter I became conscious of a damp chill, and at that instant an icy tremor passed through me, and a terrified impulse led me to glance over my shoulder. Oh, horror, I never shall forget what I saw there! Resting upon my shoulder was a hand—a woman's hand small and beautifully formed—it was white, too, but with an indescribable greenish pallor, and great drops of water stood like a death sweat upon it. Seaweed was tangled in the slender fingers, upon one of which was a massive, curiously-graven ring, the setting for a huge opal, that gleamed and paled with great throbs, as if it panted at the horror of the thing.

These details burnt themselves indelibly on my memory, but I was filled with a ghastly, sickening dread when I saw that the hand, though seemingly not severed, had no visible accompaniment. I sprang up in a panic, and dashed blindly from the room, I knew not how. All night I paced up and down, too stunned to think or come to any conclusion, and, as morning broke, I threw myself on the bed and tossed in fitful slumber. I felt miserably out of accord with the beautiful morning that greeted me as I passed with lagging step down the broad old staircase.

A sweet ringing laugh that I knew, mingled with voices in eager conversation echoed from the library, whence I had so madly rushed the night before. She whom I loved stood in the midst of a curious group, and as I entered held up her hand for my inspection. On her finger was a curiously graven ring—the same I felt with a thrill of horror that flashed with baleful light—surely the same, though now the gem was singularly lustreless and dead.

"Where did you get *that*?" I began, but stopped abruptly, fearing to betray myself. All talking together, the excited company finally made me understand that Elinor had found the ring close beside the writing table, and that no one could account for its appearance. A superstitious dread possessed me at seeing the ring on Elinor's hand. I could wish to see it anywhere but there; but I could not ask her to remove it, as I could give no reason for my strange request.

Gradually I became accustomed to the sight of the ring, and Elinor seemed so gay and happy that the horrible associations connected with it began to seem dreamlike and unreal. One night, however, finding myself unable to sleep, I went down to the library to get a book I had left on the table. The singularly brilliant moonlight made a candle unnecessary, and I had no difficulty in finding what I wanted. Turning to go, I paused, attracted by a slight sound that broke the

absolute stillness of the night—a soft groping sound as of a hand moving stealthily over a carpeted floor. As I stood listening intently, filled with a dread foreboding, something from the blackness beyond came creeping, creeping slowly toward the bright patch of moonlight at my feet. Even before it reached the light I knew too well what it was. I would have fled, but a strange numbness overcame me! I would have shrieked, but I had no voice! Now I could see it plainly as it came slowly groping out of the darkness, and continued its search in the full light—that awful hand with the pallor and sweat of death and the clinging sea weed; *but the ring was gone.*

Nearer and nearer it came, and was almost at my feet when my strained nerves gave way, and I knew nothing more till I found myself lying on the floor in the dim morning light.

* * * *

The day was fair and hot, and the gay party at the house decided to drive to a sheltered cove at some distance, which some one had declared to be a perfect bathing place. All were in high spirits, and Elinor, who was a fine swimmer, challenged me to a swimming match. A depression that I strove in vain to shake off rested upon me, although I tried to conceal it, lest I should cast a gloom over the rest.

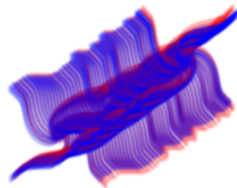
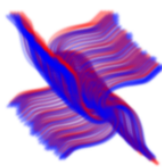
We were soon ready for the bath, and I thought I had never seen Elinor look prettier than as she dashed into the water. I followed, and we were soon swimming

abreast, far beyond the others. At that time it was rather unusual for a girl to swim, and I noted with admiration the strength and grace of her long, even stroke.

Suddenly the backward sweep of her arm was arrested, and at this moment, the fateful opal on Elinor's hand shot forth a fierce blaze of light that blinded me; but not before I had seen what made my heart stop beating for an instant. Up through the water came the hand that twice before had cursed my sight. Slowly it rose, and grasped with its awful fingers Elinor's wrist.

This I had seen—the flash from the opal—then darkness for a moment. Instinctively I clutched Elinor's arm and tried to pull her toward me—in vain, for a mighty resistless power dragged her down. I did not relax my grasp and the same force drew me down with her. I struggled frantically to free her, but my breath was soon spent, and I was forced to return to the surface. A moment, and I had plunged down again. I caught at her garments, and this time encountered no resistance.

In the meantime the bathers near the shore had noticed that something was wrong, and hastily put out in a boat, reaching the spot just as I came to the surface with my precious burden. She was lifted tenderly into the boat, and I followed, only to find that my efforts had been in vain—she was dead. One thing only remains for me to record, **THE RING WAS GONE.**



The Story of an Ostrich Egg.

BY ELSIE SNOWE.

NELLY FARLEY was a "hard-worked young woman," as a sympathizing observer had once said; early and late, rain or shine, she took her place in Madame Adler's millinery establishment, and gave her time, thought and taste, and the industry of her capable young hands for the wretched pittance that formed the only income of herself and mother. So long as her mother's smile welcomed her each night that she came home, weary and worn, Nelly never complained. In fact, she was, in a negative way, quite happy, because she was not unhappy, and had never really known the keen joys of existence. But when, after a brief but severe illness, Mrs. Farley one day closed her gentle eyes forever, Nelly felt with terrible force that life was black instead of grey, and from that time forward it became almost unendurable. After the funeral she went to work as usual; work was mere routine, and she no more thought of giving it up than of ceasing to breathe. But she found everything horribly and cruelly changed. There was no one to welcome her at night when she returned from the day's drudgery; no one to say "good-bye" when she went out in the morning; no one to listen and sympathize with the little trials of the day. Her solitude pressed upon her like some material weight, and she felt at times as if she must go mad from a hopeless longing for the lost presence that would not return. Her health failed. Her appetite left her. A crust of bread and cup of milk was all she ate from morning till night. As a natural consequence her work became more than distasteful; it

soon became almost impossible. Often her hands fell listlessly in her lap, her attention wandered so that she could not answer the simplest question intelligently, and frequent tears fell on the delicate lace, ribbons or velvet, which her deft fingers had lost all power to weave into the airy and fanciful structures which she had once been so quick at suggesting and constructing. Madame often spoke sharply and cruelly, and at last declared that her favorite work-woman had become a mere hindrance and nuisance in the room, and added bluntly that, unless there was a change for the better without loss of time, her "absence would be much preferred to her company."

So listless had Nelly become that she hardly took in the meaning of these ominous words. Nevertheless, they gave point to the contents of a letter which she found awaiting her that night when she returned to her lone and cheerless room. The letter was from an uncle in California—her father's only brother; and its curt and cruel tone at any other time would have caused her to fling it from her in disgust. Instead of doing this, however, she read it over two or three times, and then sat thinking of it, absorbed in its contents.

LOS ANGELES, Nov. 17, 1885.

Dear Niece:—By chance I picked up a newspaper from the East, in which I saw the announcement of your mother's death. I guess that it must be your mother, for Ellen Freeborn Farley ain't a common name, and the paper was dated from the town in York where my brother John died. John was the unluckiest fel-

low I ever knew, and when he capped the climax of his ill fortune by marrying your mother, I gave him up. I never liked Ellen Freeborn, anyway, and after that I just "natchully" hated her, as we say here. Next I heard of John he was dead, as well as buried, and since then I never heard a word of his wife or widow till I read of her death the other day. You, I reckon, must be the young girl spoken of as the only mourner. I suppose your name is Ellen, after your mother—that would be John's way. Now, niece, if you are all alone in the world, why, so am I, and, like enough, you haven't much of this world's goods; you wouldn't be John Farley's daughter if you had. No matter about that! I have enough for both, and, perhaps, after all, I've a soft spot somewhere in my heart, or head! Anyhow, I'm getting on in years, and I've a kind of hankering after some creature of my own kith and kin, for the fellow who said that "blood was thicker'n water" was about right. If you feel like coming out here to me, I don't think you'll regret it; and I promise to do as well by you as if you were my own daughter. Enclosed you will find a check that will cover all expenses, and you can choose your own way of coming—overland or by water, just as you prefer.

Your uncle,
CHRISTOPHER FARLEY.

P. S.—Write or telegraph. My business card is enclosed.

P. S. S.—You will find the check made out in such a way that you will have to prove identity before you can draw it.

Each time that she read over this characteristic but not very cordial letter, Nelly's face brightened more and more. It was from her uncle—she knew that well enough—and she would have no trouble at all in proving her identity. The check was for five hundred dollars—a fortune in itself. She had never dreamed of possessing so much money at any one time; but the thing that seemed to impart new life to the lonely girl, was the breath of change and novelty, the glimpse of a new and wonderful world outside the lead-colored existence which was killing her, and, since her mother's death, had become absolutely intolerable.

"I will go! yes, I will go!" she said, in her excitement speaking aloud. "Mother, dear mother, I would rather die and go to you, my one, only love in all the world. But that is impossible; I must live my life: it was given to me for some use; and I will go out into this strange new world, where, perhaps, I may find out the purpose of existence."

With the marvellous elasticity of youth, Nelly Farley already seemed a new being. She locked her door and went out to the nearest restaurant, where she dined comfortably, even luxuriously—almost for the first time in her life. And though she was too much excited for sleep when she returned, she spent the first half of the night to good advantage, packing her trunk and laying out plans for her journey. She decided to make the journey by water, for she had a passionate love of the ocean, and time was of no account. She wrote to her uncle, accepting his invitation and telling him when she would leave New York city and on what steamer; and assuring him that she had found no difficulty in cashing the generous check he had sent her. Within a week, all her simple preparations were made, and she was on board one of the fine steamers of the Pacific Mail Service, *via* Panama, for the port of San Francisco.

The voyage, which to so many might have been monotonous and even tiresome, was to Nelly like a glimpse of Heaven. From the first moment, everything interested and delighted her; the ocean breezes brought the long-absent rose-bloom to her cheek, and her spirits, naturally buoyant, brightened so that she was almost gay, and, indeed, often chided herself that she *could* feel so happy in the absence of the mother whom she had so loved and whom she now missed in every movement, in every new thrill of pleasure. But she was far from morbid in her sorrow, and, feeling that her mother would rejoice in her changed circumstances and returning health and happiness, she encouraged the belief that the gentle spirit who had left her really felt, and knew, and rejoiced with her in that new existence wherever it might be.

As there is no cosmetic like health and happiness, Nelly, who had always been intended for a pretty girl, fairly bloomed

under the influence of her new feelings and the delicious sea-breezes which now became laden with the breath of the tropics, and long before they had reached Colon, the handsome, Spanish-looking youth who occupied the seat at table directly opposite to her, had decided that she was the loveliest girl he had ever seen; and to say that Nelly fully appreci-

affair progresses more quickly during one day on board a tranquil, easy-going steamer, than during a month or half a year of commonplace meetings and partings on land. It was, then, with a sudden and unmistakable shock that Nelly listened to Mr. Alburque when he said, in his carefully chosen English, which his slight foreign accent made only more



"ALBURQUE SEIZED ONE SLENDER HAND, DREW IT GENTLY TOWARD HIM AND PRESSED HIS LIPS TO IT."

ated his glances of admiration and the trifling little acts of attention he had shown her, is only stating the fact mildly. She had never before known the most trifling approach to a flirtation; and everyone—even those who have never taken a sea-voyage—understands the rapid advance of acquaintanceship under these circumstances. The first stages of a love-

fascinating:

"To-morrow, Miss Farley, we will part—but oh! I hope, not forever!"

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nelly, turning pale, and then flushing to the temples as a realization of her own feelings rushed over her.

"Why, you know that my journey ends at Colon—at Aspinwall," said the young

Spaniard, softly. "Do you really care?—are you sorry?"

Nelly felt that she cared so much—that her tell-tale face had so betrayed her that in her confusion she raised both hands to her burning cheeks and bent her head in shame. They were alone in the *salon*, and Alburque seized one slender hand, drew it gently toward him, and pressed his lips to it.

"Speak to me!" he said. "Let me hear you say that you are sorry to say 'good-by' to me." But before he could proceed further, Nelly had snatched her hand from his grasp, indignantly exclaiming: "You are very rude, sir—how dare you take such liberty," and then several persons came into the *salon*—it was an almost impossible chance that they had been alone even for that brief time, and without allowing him a moment for explanation the embarrassed girl turned and hurried away to her state-room.

II.

That evening Nelly Farley did not appear at the dinner-table. She could not truly say that she was ill, but, much to the surprise of the black stewardess, she asked to have some dinner brought to her room; and though it was a lovely night, and she had been, hitherto, one of the most enthusiastic admirers of the magnificent tropic moonlight, she did not even appear on deck. She felt angry and hurt—she scarcely knew why—but in all her life no man had ever taken her hand before, and no lips save her mother's had ever touched her. Her life had been so lone, so quiet and uneventful that among even her girl friends none were intimate enough for kissing. She could not disguise from herself that the Spaniard's gentle salute had been of the most respectful, but it had shocked her all the same, and she tried to persuade herself that the thrill it had sent all along her fingers and thence to her heart had been caused by rage and indignation.

"How dare he?" she thought. "He must have thought me very ignorant and inexperienced to suppose that I would calmly permit such impertinence! What have I done that he should think so meanly of me? No man ever before treated me with disrespect,—but he shall

see I am neither ignorant nor a simpleton, though I may not know very much of the world," and then her face tinged with hot blushes, and she determined that Mr. Alburque should not even gaze upon her face again.

The next morning at five o'clock the ship was anchored in the Bay of Colon, and for the first time Nelly looked on the quaint little red-roofed houses, and the tropical trees that line the coast. She was still agitated, and her heart ached with a vague regret that she did not understand, but she found plenty to admire, and interest and occupy her thoughts, so that for a time she forgot the soft, dark eyes that had pursued her all night in dreams. But the young Spaniard fully appreciated the old proverb, and Nelly found that he was not of the "faint-hearted" kind, for, though he had landed in the very early morning with the rest of the passengers, he found an opportunity to see her again for a fleeting "adieu," just as she was stepping on board the train that carried the passengers across the Isthmus, and as he took her little satchel and parasol, and without a word assisted her on the train and found a seat for her, he contrived to put into her hand a tiny basket of fruit and flowers, among which was concealed—not too carefully—a missive which Nelly felt instinctively was her first love-letter. She had no time to consider whether she ought to receive it or not before the giver had returned her satchel and parasol, and with a faint, tender pressure of her fingers and a swift but ardent glance into her shy eyes, had disappeared in the motley crowd of many-colored people that thronged the platform.

Nelly debated within herself for some minutes whether she ought to read the letter or not; but, of course, she read it. All in a moment it came to her that, without doubt, the note contained some apology for the writer's freedom on the previous day; and, of course, no lady could refuse a gentleman's apology. The next moment she had torn open the dainty, perfumed billet and had read it over more than once, with glowing cheeks but quite without resentment. It was prettily expressed, and the young Spaniard had taken some pains in his choice of English:

"The Senorita must not be offended with one who adores her, if he has ventured to show that feeling more warmly than she would permit in the cold world from which she has come. The Senorita is not a coquette. No! her sweet eyes, her gentle smile, her soft voice, all show her truth and modesty; therefore she cannot be quite indifferent to one who can never be indifferent even to the sound of her name." And at this point the young Spaniard dropped from the formal third person into the familiar and endearing first person, and his tone grew both impassioned and entreating. "Dear Nelly, I love thee. Thou art the first girl I have ever loved—the only one I ever can love. I stay here but a brief while. I will follow thee, I will find thee. Be my wife! Thy precious eyes have looked into mine, and I have seen there the reflection of my own love. Thou art the one woman in the world for me, and thou must be mine—my sweet and honored wife. I will find thee again and claim thee; aye, if the whole world sought to hide thee from me.

"Ever your adoring and faithful lover,
"JOSÉ ALBURQUE."

This might be regarded as an apology, Nelly felt. At any rate, it was a declaration of love and an unmistakable offer of marriage; therefore, there was no need for indignation. Evidently Mr. Alburque had not intended any disrespect, and his apparent freedom of manner had been merely the ardor of his Southern temperament; and all Nelly's puritanical notions melted into the warm air of the tropical summer about her. She gave herself up to the unrestrained luxury of her first love dream. And how the rest of her journey passed she could not have told in words. She remembered parts of it clearly—they were the few unpleasant episodes—and all else mingled with the luxurious charm of her feelings and became a part of them. When the Pacific journey began, at sunset of the following day, life had already become a delightful dream, and the days passed so swiftly that she was both surprised and disappointed when others hailed with eager delight the first glimpse of San Francisco. But soon she also felt glad that the journey was over;

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for it brought her nearer to José—she now called him José always in her thoughts; and though she could not imagine how it was to be accomplished, she felt a certainty that he would find her, and at no distant day,

Nelly found her Uncle Christopher waiting for her on the pier, and his welcome was far more cordial than his letter had led her to expect. But she soon learned that the worst of Uncle Christopher was on the surface; those who had the patience to penetrate below the outer shell, which was pretty hard, were rewarded for the effort; and, from the first, she liked the eccentric old man, and she was a prime favorite at once, and remained so. From him she learned that his home was not in the City of the Angels, but on a ranch some thirty or forty miles distant; and they at once took train for Los Angeles, which was their nearest point. On the way, Mr. Farley told his niece a hundred things about his various farms; for he "raised" ostriches, oranges, walnuts, grapes, etc., etc., on various farms in different parts of the State, and Nelly saw that her life would be one of varied interest.

"And how do you attend to *all* these farms, uncle? Surely you have overseer's, or managers, or what do you call them?"

"Of course I have. A man can't be in two places at once, and I have been singularly fortunate in having a kind of general factotum who attended to almost everything for me—of course, he had other and smaller stewards under him, but I have had the misfortune to lose him. He met with an accident which has laid him up, and I have just engaged a young fellow to take his place—a young Spaniard."

Nelly's heart gave a tumultuous bound, though she felt how absurd was the thought that passed through her mind. Of course, there were scores of young Spaniards in California, and yet, oh! if it should have been José!—but no, that would be just like a story-book, and things never happened so in real life. And yet, what could be more like a romance than her whole life since the night on which she had received her uncle's letter? She was so immersed in these thoughts that she could not follow her uncle's words, and was only

recalled from her wild fancies by a sudden question,—“You’ve never seen an ostrich farm, perhaps?”

“O no, uncle—how should I? I never was out of the State of New York before.”

“To be sure—well, you’ll like it out here, for the climate is glorious, and there’s just everything to interest a girl of brains. But you mustn’t go falling in love with this fellow—he’s only my overseer, remember, tho’ he’s just the handsomest boy I ever laid eyes on, and he was a likely enough match for any girl a few months ago. But he’s a poor man now, and I expect you to do better than a hired man, my girl, for I like you—and I’m worth half a million, I am, and you’re the only living thing I can claim kin with;—then you’re as pretty as a prairie rose, and any fellow might be proud of you for a wife; so no fooling with Mr. José, for he’ll fall in love with you sure if you smile on him, and I don’t know as I want *him* going round with his heart in a sling, either, for that spoils a man for work, and I calculate to have my work done just as slick as any man can do it.”

“José!”

Nelly’s heart stood still for a moment—could it be?—but no! It was impossible, and she dared not ask her uncle the rest of the young man’s name. Her heart beat so wildly she couldn’t speak, and a shyness quite overwhelming made her shrink from any question that might bring on her an unexpected rebuff, during this, her first acquaintance with her strange uncle, who seemed so well disposed toward her.

They reached home about four o’clock the next day, and in the interval Uncle Christopher had made no further reference to his new manager, except to remark that he had sent him on an errand to look after some “Orange land about sixty or seventy miles up country and didn’t expect him back at Oriole Lodge for a week or two.”

A volume might be written on Nelly’s first experiences of life in California, but it would make this truthful little history far too long, and still it would fail of doing justice to the subject.

The house was a fine new building, mostly of red-wood, and built on the old-fashioned double cottage plan, very wide,

large and roomy, with only two stories—such houses in the country are never more than two stories—with verandas, or “galleries” running entirely around the house, with awnings on every side to shade the inhabitants from the clear white light of the sun, which was also softened by the wilderness of flowering vines and climbing roses that made the place a perfect bower of the richest, choicest flowers.

Nelly’s wildest dreams had never pictured such beauty and luxury as now surrounded her, and her uncle was extravagant in his appreciation of what he called “her pretty looks.” Nothing pleased him more than giving her presents and spending money on her; and, although she was in mourning, he hired a seamstress, who contrived to make costumes of lace and silk that were marvels of beauty and becomingness, tho’ only “black robes” as the French sewing-girl said, with a sigh of regret. And although Nelly occasionally reproached herself for the interest she took in such things, she felt it would be most ungracious toward her uncle to slight his gifts.

On a certain evening about a month after her arrival in California Nelly Farley was seated near the window, talking and jesting with a new acquaintance—a Mr. Norman Sinclair, who often rode over from a neighboring village to visit Mr. Farley; by some mischievous chance her bracelet became unfastened, and as she held out her wrist for Mr. Sinclair to fasten the clasp her eyes glanced past him through the window and met the angry, grieved, jealous glance of a pair of dark, flashing eyes, that were at that moment gazing on her as one gazes at a treasure long lost and found at last in the possession of another.

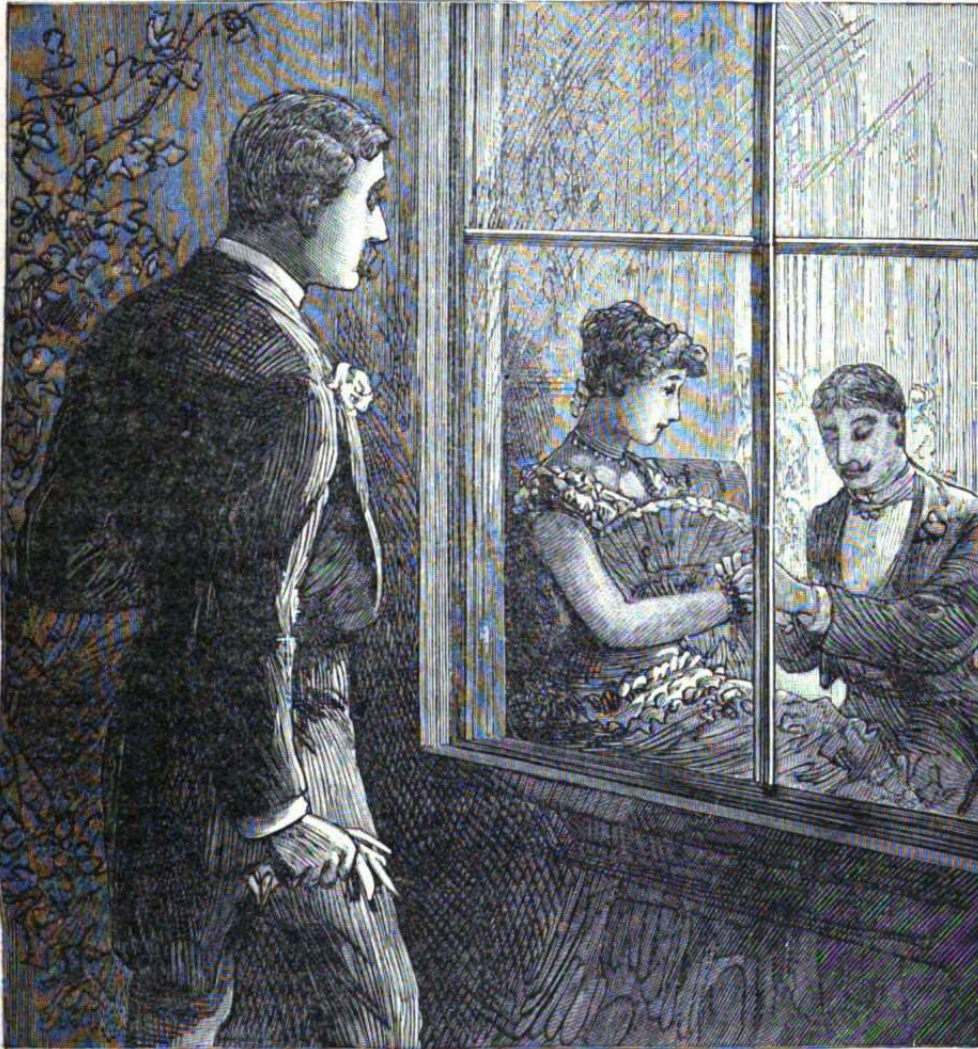
III.

It was with an indescribable thrill that Nelly recognized the handsome, but now pale and saddened countenance, of José Alburque. He bowed with a manner of deep and profound respect, and the next moment he had disappeared—indeed, so sudden had been his coming and going that she almost doubted if her imagination had not played her some trick; and seeing that she was strangely *distracted* and even agitated, although he could not guess

why, Mr. Sinclair very soon took his leave.

But before the evening was over Nelly found that she had not made any mistake, for Mr. Alburque appeared at dinner, and she was formally introduced to him. He hardly addressed a single remark to her,

few rather adroit questions she easily guessed that he must also be her José—but if so, why did he not hasten to Oriole Lodge and claim the love of which he had seemed almost too sure?—for, of course, he must have guessed from his employer's name who the niece was that had recently



"AS SHE HELD OUT HER WRIST TO MR. SINCLAIR TO FASTEN THE CLASP."

and she was both piqued and vexed so that she soon retired to her own room, and with bitter tears gave herself up to solitary grieving. During the month she had spent in her new home Nelly had soon learned that her uncle's new manager was indeed named José Alburque, and by a

arrived from the East. Oh! how provoking, when fate itself seemed to have brought them together again, that now he would not take advantage of the fortunate chance! Then came the remembrance of all her uncle's warning—could she be so ungrateful as to disappoint him now in

his so often expressed wish when he had treated her with the kindness and consideration of a father to a daughter?

Alas! alas! the course of true love never did run smooth—Nelly had just taken up the study of Shakespeare, and felt the truth of that line with particular force.

That the young Spaniard no longer felt himself at liberty, because of his change of fortune, to aspire to the hand of his employer's niece and prospective heiress, did not for a moment occur to her—her only thought was that Alburque's feelings for her—if they had ever been genuine—had changed, and she bitterly reproached herself for the easy credulity that had accepted so seriously the first careless love making of one who had, probably, said as much to every girl he met, if only she was silly enough to listen to him. "But he shall see I am not so easily won!" she thought for although she was now madly in love with the dark eyed, melancholy youth, she was glad to remember that he could only *guess* at her feelings—she had never uttered a word of them. And how she blessed the chance that made him ignorant of how she felt.

Probably there never was a girl more free from coquetry than Nelly Farley, and yet circumstances now made her appear like the most arrant flirt. In her dread of betraying her real feelings, she adopted toward Alburque a manner calculated to chill the most ardent and confident lover, while she showered smiles and gentle words on Norman Sinclair. From the first moment he had admired her, and he was only too glad to accept the flattering encouragement which he seemed to receive; and it was only Nelly's amazement and grief at receiving a proposal of marriage from him that proved to him his own mistake.

"O, do forgive me, Mr. Sinclair, pray, pray do!" she said entreatingly, and, coming impulsively toward him, she held out her hands with a grace and sweetness that only made her more irresistible. "Indeed, I never dreamed that you could misunderstand my feelings. Of course, I like you—who wouldn't? I never had a brother—"

"There! that will do!" exclaimed Sinclair, deeply hurt. "Of course, I am to blame, but don't offer to be a sister to

me—that is really too much—I don't want to be your brother."

"I'm sure, I don't know why. I would be a very good sister; and any gentleman ought to know, when a girl is so very easy in his company, and never the least bit shy or sad, that—at least I mean—"

"O, yes, I understand!" said Sinclair bitterly. "When a girl smiles on a fellow, and seems delighted to see him, and tells him so, then he's to understand she cares nothing about him; but when she turns pale and draws herself up as if a rattlesnake had sounded, and speaks as if she hated the sight of a fellow, then she's in love with him, I suppose. Do you feel like a sister to Mr. Alburque, I wonder?"

"Then you may wonder, Mr. Sinclair, and I think your remark a very impertinent one," and with a flush of resentment crimsoning her face, Miss Nelly swept from the room like a young queen.

As she did so, she almost walked into the arms of José Alburque, who was coming in the opposite direction. For one moment their eyes met, and the glance of his, so dark and glowing, so soft and gentle, went straight to her heart. She could not return that look, so full of love and tenderness, with her customary coldness and hauteur—an involuntary sigh burst from her lips as she hastened past him, and the glance she sent back over her shoulder was full of maidenly encouragement, even while her face crimsoned again and she asked herself:

"How much did he hear? How much does he guess? Have I hopelessly betrayed myself?"

That day, at dinner, Uncle Christopher suddenly announced his intention of going to the Ostrich farm on the next day, and invited Nelly to accompany him.

"You are an excellent horsewoman now, considering the brief time you have been learning, and Mr. Alburque here will take care of you. I can tell you, he rides like Mazeppa; I rather pride myself on being a good horseman for an old man, but I never saw the day I could sit a horse like José. Are there any eggs over at the farm, Alburque?"

"Yes, Señor, a few—though they are scarce, I believe. All are being used for hatching, as you know."

"What in the world do you want of an Ostrich egg, Uncle Christopher?"

"Well, they are good for many things, my dear, and they do say they are very fine eating, though I've never been hungry enough to try. But, you know, it is coming close on Easter, and I have a fancy for an Easter egg."

"It will be large enough," said Nelly with a laugh, "like everything else in California."

But, though she spoke lightly, she was keenly aware of the flush of pleasure that had swept over Albuquerque's face when

true that José did not, in words, refer to the love he had once so passionately declared, but every glance of his eyes assured her that it was still ardently burning in his soul, and a sudden intuition ex-



"OH! DO FORGIVE ME!"

her uncle spoke of the coming expedition. And, indeed, Nelly Farley always remembered that ride to the Ostrich farm as one of the brightest days in existence. It was

plained to her the reason of his silence. She no longer treated him with studied coldness, and if she had, Albuquerque would not have misunderstood her manner any

longer, for, quite accidentally, he had overheard Sinclair's angry and satirical words, for they had been spoken loudly. But he did not take any unfair advantage of his knowledge of Nelly's feelings, for he would have thought it dishonorable toward his employer, who trusted him implicitly.

As for Uncle Christopher, it is doubtful if his ideas as to sentiment were quite so serene as he was fond of saying; and it is certain that he watched the two young people directly under his observation with a gentle toleration, and something very like admiration and sympathy.

Meantime, Easter Sunday arrived, and at breakfast Mr. Farley produced his wonderful Easter egg, and presented it to Nelly and Alburque.

"It belongs to both of you," he said, placing it midway between their plates; "and after breakfast you may open it and make an effort to digest the contents. For the present, you may look at it and admire it, and I rather think it deserves it."

The large and somewhat ungainly looking Ostrich egg had been transformed into something so pretty as to be scarcely recognizable. On either side of it was an exquisite little portrait painted at considerable expense by an excellent artist; one was from a little photograph of Nelly, the other from one of Alburque. The side containing Nelly's picture was turned toward José, and that on which his was painted, toward Nelly; and from the time the pictures were seen and recognized, very little attention was given to breakfast by either of these young people. And as Uncle Christopher seemed to have lost his appetite also, he very soon left them alone.

For some moments, Nelly and Alburque sat looking at the Easter egg, and then, as

if suddenly overcome with the absurdity of their silence, both burst into laughter, and Nelly put out her hand and drew the Ostrich egg toward her.

"I am going to open it, anyway," she said, pressing a little knob of gold at the top, which caused the egg to part, for it had been cut in two and fitted with delicate golden hinges, and within it was lined with satin and mother-of-pearl, forming an exquisite jewel case, and holding a superb diamond ring for Nelly and a gypsy ring of gold and rubies for José, and a folded slip of paper.

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Nelly, as she slipped her own ring on her finger, and presented the other to her companion. He could not resist the temptation to press his lips to her white hand as he received the ring from it. She did not repulse him—by this time she had learned that a salute on the hand was not an impertinence; and she merely took up the slip of paper, unfolding it as she said:

"Dear Uncle Christopher! How kind and generous he is! Let us see what he says!"

The missive was short, but it sent a crimson tide of delighted feeling to Nelly's cheeks.

"O José—you must read it! I can't," she said, and put the slip of paper in his hand. A single glance sufficed for the young Spaniard to absorb the meaning of the written lines; and the next moment the two young people were folded in each other's arms.

This was Uncle Christopher's Easter card:—

"You silly Boy and Girl! Don't you know that you are in love with each other?—or do you wait for an old fellow like me to tell you so? Find it out for yourselves—be happy! And an old man's blessing go with you."



\$5,000 FOR A WIFE.

By the Author of "Wedded to Misery."



XV.

RS. TREMAINE-BLOUNT had assumed the garb of that very deep mourning which is measured out in yards of crape and inches of black-bordered stationery. Her robes of India cashmere swept over the library carpet with that elegant, hushed sound which many affect and few attain.

"Brandon!" she said, with a gesture of disgust. "For pity sake! Take those hyacinths away. Between the rose jar, Mr. Taunton's Parma violets, and those things, it smells like a perfume shop."

"Ah, Mrs. Blount!" said her guest, who was practicing a trick at *ecarté* on a chair by the fire. "I thought you were fond of flowers?"

Brandon, the butler, was gathering up the offending flowers with a side glance at the ex-housekeeper, whose marriage with the late Mr. Blount had been published a week ago. The new Mrs. Blount passed her hands over her eyes.

"It is only those hyacinths," she said, in a melancholy tone. "They always speak to me of death; their odor seems to come from the tomb."

Her companion laid the king of clubs edgewise on his lips. He would have whistled, but Mrs. Blount gave him a keen glance that made him straighten up with a sudden sense of propriety.

"Your marriage with Mr. Blount must have been a great surprise," he observed somewhat irrelevantly.

"To his relatives—yes," she replied. "If the occasion had been a less solemn one, it would have been amusing to see them when the will was read, and then, again, when Mr. Terry announced the marriage."

Her guest burst out laughing.

"Hush!" she cried, glancing about in alarm; but the butler had gone. "Edo-

uardo," she added, angrily, "you are most imprudent."

The Spaniard kept on laughing, but in a softer tone.

"My dear Nana," he said, "I cannot help giving way to my feelings at times. It is all such a splendid thing—this play of yours. By heavens, I admire you. You come to-day into possession of five hundred thousand dollars—whew! You can well afford to grant your poor brother an annuity."

He gathered up the cards, and shuffled them with the skill of a monte-player.

"There is one thing certain," said Mrs. Blount, sharply, "if you are not more careful, you cannot stay here any longer."

The Spaniard yawned.

"Come, now, you know you cannot get along without me. I am here as your confidential adviser—ha! ha! Besides, there is a little matter of business we have yet to settle—"

"I want to talk about that," said Mrs. Blount. "You promised me, Edouardo—"

"Say nothing!" he replied, waving his hand. "I am ready when you are."

Mrs. Blount glided across the room to a small apartment once used by Mr. Blount as an office.

"Come in here," she said. "We can be alone. Walls have ears in this house."

The Spaniard followed her, and, at her command, closed the door.

"You have with you the papers?" she asked.

"I have. On the payment of the sum I named, they are yours. Taunton expects me to call and see him again; but a bird in hand is my motto!"

"I will pay you your price," said Mrs. Blount, quickly. "Taunton can't do that now. He hasn't the money. Just wait a moment."

She left the room, and the Spaniard was alone.

"Ah!" he said, and, springing up, he locked the door after her. Then, almost

with a kind of instinct, he thrust his hand in his pocket and drew out a bunch of keys, among which was a queer-looking bit of twisted wire. Mr. Blount's desk stood against the wall, locked; but in a moment he had opened it, and run through the drawers like a professional thief.

"Nothing here," he said, with some disappointment, "unless—ah! a journal!" He heard a step. To put the little Russian leather diary in his pocket was a second's work. The desk was locked and office door unfastened several minutes before Mrs. Blount came trailing her black skirts over the library floor. The Spaniard was sitting there quietly manicuring himself.

"I have the money," said Mrs. Blount, locking the door again.

"Here are the papers," he replied, drawing them from his pocket. The exchange was rapid. He counted his bills, and she unfolded her new possession.

"Ten years ago," she said, half musingly, "what would I not have given for this!"

She held in her hand the certificate of her marriage with Tremaine.

"And this!" she added, glancing at the other paper with a look of triumph. "At last, Mr. Geoffrey Taunton! Here is your agreement—the proof that you sold Miss Eyre to your rival for five thousand dollars!"

"What are you going to do with it?" asked the Spaniard, curiously. "The morning paper announces the engagement of Miss Eyre and Mr. Taunton in the next column to the proceedings in court where Mr. Leigh Lewellyn is sent up to prison for three months!"

"Something has driven Taunton to announce his engagement," said Mrs. Blount. "Miss Eyre called on me just after Mr. Blount's death, and she told me she was engaged; but it was to be a great secret."

"The girl is as poor as a church-mouse," said the Spaniard, shrugging his shoulders. "He will be a bigger fool than I think, if he marries her now."

"He will not marry her now!" said Mrs. Blount, significantly.

"Bah, Nana! cried the Spaniard, "I believe you are sweet on that fellow yet!"

"Mind your business, Edouardo!"

she cried, sharply. "Come, I am going out."

The Spaniard put the money in his pocket, and they left the room together.

"Ah, Brandon!" said Mrs. Blount, as she closed the door, "who is it?"

The butler put a card in her hand.

"Miss Eyre!" she said in some surprise. "Show her in the drawing-room. Edouardo," she added in a low tone, "you'd better keep out of the way."

Antoinette was not looking well that day, but she was just as pretty as ever.

"Dear Mrs. Tremaine," she began, "I beg your pardon, but it is so hard to remember. I mean Mrs. Blount. I could not help running out to see you this morning. You know," she added, "you were so good to me when I was sick here, after the ice party, that I have always thought of you as a very dear friend."

Mrs. Blount took the girl's fair face between her hands, and kissed her.

"I am glad of that," she said, sweetly. "I hope we shall always be friends. But what is this I hear about your engagement to Mr. Taunton? How did the papers get hold of it?"

"Oh," said Antoinette, "it is all out now. After that unfortunate affair of Taunton's, you know, he—he wanted me to be married right away, and—"

"Then you settled all your doubts about it, I suppose?" said Mrs. Blount, eying her keenly.

Antoinette looked uneasy.

"Did I have any?" she said, with a short laugh. "Mamma says I never know my own mind. But it is all arranged now. We are to be married next month."

"I congratulate you," said Mrs. Blount, smoothly. "You will live at Bonnybrae, of course. How nice it will be to get back in your old home."

"Yes, if papa were only well. He was taken sick on Thursday, and we are very much worried about him."

"Indeed! I am very sorry. You must get him well for your wedding. I am sorry I shall not be able to go, but, of course, so soon after Mr. Blount's death—"

"Oh, yes, I understand. We shan't have much of a wedding. It will be in the church, of course."

"Well," said Mrs. Blount, with a

peculiar laugh, "there is one thing certain. Mr. Lewellyn won't be there."

A sudden change came over Antoinette's face. She colored scarlet.

"We should not want him, anyhow," she said stiffly.

"Of course not! But—excuse me, my dear, would you mind telling me just what the trouble was between Mr. Taunton and Mr. Lewellyn? I never quite understood, and one hears so many rumors."

"It is all very distasteful to us," said Antoinette, biting her lips. "Mamma and I had been out at the opera with Mr. Taunton, you know, and—"

"Ah, yes! On the night it all occurred?"

"Yes; and Mr. Lewellyn was there with Belle Campbell. Mr. Taunton met him afterwards in Volney's, and—well, Mr. Taunton says he said something about me in the bar-room. Mr. Taunton slapped him in the face, and afterwards he laid in waiting for Mr. Taunton, and sprang out upon him just as he was going into the house. Of course Mr. Taunton did not know he was there, and he was knocked down."

"What an outrage! But—I wouldn't let it worry you, my dear. I am sure your name has not been mixed up in it hardly any at all. Why, I hadn't the least idea that it happened in that way. I never heard about this bar-room episode before."

"Mr. Taunton has taken great pains to keep it quiet," said Antoinette, with honest conviction.

"Quite proper of him, I am sure. In one way, you must feel proud to have had such proof of Mr. Taunton's devotion and courage. How you must admire him!"

"Of course," said Antoinette, with her little short laugh again, "one always admires the man one is going to marry."

"Does one?" said Mrs. Blount, with a mocking note in her voice. "You speak like a woman of experience."

Antoinette rose to go.

"I just called to tell you we had changed our plans," she said. "No, I can't stop any longer. Papa is really quite ill this morning."

Mrs. Blount murmured her sympathy and adieu with delicate sweetness, and

yet Antoinette left her with a sense of disturbance.

"I do not think Mrs. Blount likes Mr. Taunton—Geoffrey, I suppose I ought to call him," she said to herself, "and yet they always seemed to be such good friends. I used to think he admired her a great deal more than he did me."

She sighed, but it was not a sigh of jealousy, rather one of strange, indefinable regret.

"I do not know what is coming over me," she said, with a kind of terror of herself. "Why do I feel as I do? Geoffrey is so good to me, and mamma is so happy about it. Poor papa acts very strangely; but then, he is ill. Of course, it is best I should marry Mr. Taunton. There is no one else whom I care for—no one at all."

A faint catch in the breath seemed to stifle her last words; but she said them over and over again, as though she would convince herself.

"There is no one else whom I care for; I ought to be happy."

XVI.

Antoinette's wedding-day had stolen around at last. Mrs. Eyre was jubilant. She stood in the center of the room where her daughter's wedding dress was spread out on the bed, and gazed at the shimmering folds of silk with intense satisfaction.

"Well, my dear!" she said, turning her head from one side to the other, "considering how short a time we had, and how little money we had to do it with, I think we have gotten up a very nice trousseau."

Antoinette was standing by the window, watching her father's feeble form as he went tottering down the street. It was raining, a dull, heavy, sodden rain.

"There are plenty of clothes," she replied without looking around, "too many, I think, for our circumstances. People will wonder where they came from. The daughters of bankrupts are not usually married in Lyons brocade and point d'Alençon."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Eyre impatiently. "The lace is old. It is mine, and of course I have some things of my own which the sheriff didn't get hold of. But if you don't want to wear it, Antoi-

nette, you needn't. I never saw such a strange girl as you are! If you would only take the least interest in your clothes, we might make a better appearance. But you don't seem to care what you are married in, or whether you are married at all."

Antoinette turned away from the window with a sigh.

"Well, mamma!" she said, sinking down into a chair, "I haven't the heart for anything, and I don't see how you can bear to fuss with these things, when poor papa is so sick and miserable. I feel somehow that he isn't going to live very long, and he seems so upset about my marriage anyhow. I think it would have been much better if I had been married quietly at home without any of this fuss."

Mrs. Eyre sniffed indignantly and shook out some imaginary creases from Antoinette's veil.

"Your father is getting childish," she replied, shortly.

"He is ill, mamma, and I don't think you are very kind to him!" Antoinette burst forth. "You are not like you used to be, mamma. Since papa lost all his money—"

"You don't know what you are talking about," said Mrs. Eyre, coldly. "If you knew what I have had to bear—"

"What have you had to bear?" Antoinette demanded. "I wish you would tell me. You are always hinting at some dreadful thing that you have to put up with, and yet you never tell me what it is. It is not right, mamma. It is not fair to papa or to me."

Mrs. Eyre burst into a flood of hysterical tears.

"That's right!" she cried. "Cast it all up to me! After all I have done for you, Antoinette, it is very becoming for you to abuse me!"

"Well! but, mamma—"

"You want to know what I have to bear? Well! I have kept it from you for months, but I will not keep it any longer. Your father is not ill, Antoinette, save so far as his own excesses have brought him to his present wretched state."

"My father is not a drunkard!"

"No; but he is an opium-eater."

"Oh, mamma!"

"It is true. You are old enough to know it now; you ought to know it. He has used opium for years, and now his health is shattered by it. He has wrecked his whole life. And yet you blame me for being impatient with him. You think I ought to excuse everything!"

Antoinette was silent. The blow had struck home. A great lump rose up in her throat; but, somehow, the only words she could find were "Poor papa!"

"If you knew what I have had to endure," her mother went on, hysterically. "Time and time again, when your father has come home under the influence of that horrible drug, I have had to screen him from you, and keep him from disgracing us both."

"Why did you not tell me this before?" said Antoinette, gravely. "If I had known, I think some things might have been different."

"My dear," said Mrs. Eyre, helplessly, "don't reproach me. I have done my best, Heaven knows."

Antoinette sighed.

"What a cheerful wedding-day!" she thought, glancing out of the window. The rain was pouring steadily down.

"For pity's sake," cried her mother, drying her eyes, "don't let us talk of anything more that is disagreeable. You are going to be married, Antoinette. You will have a lovely home, and all your heart can wish. There will be no worry about money for you, and that is the whole secret of comfort in this world."

The front door opened and closed with a bang.

"That is your father!" said Mrs. Eyre, quickly, "he has been to the drug store."

Antoinette sprang up and went downstairs. She saw her father's bent and tottering form pass into the library.

"Papa!" she called to him and ran to him, taking his hands. "You are ill!"

He looked at her with the strange glance she had used to attribute to approaching insanity; but now she knew its cause and shuddered. Why had she never known this before? Why had she been so blind and stupid?

Mr. Eyre sank down into a chair and rubbed his face with his handkerchief. It was soiled with an ugly brown stain, and Antoinette took it away from him.

"Oh!" he said, dully, "is it you, 'Toinette? I thought you were married to-day."

"Not yet, papa," she said, gently. "Not till twelve o'clock. What do you want? Shall I get you a glass of water?"

"Yes—wa'er. I am very thirsty."

He drank eagerly, and lay back in the chair, breathing very slowly.

"Is—Taunton here?" he asked, with his eyes half shut.

"No," she replied; and, kneeling down beside him, she began to stroke his hair softly.

There were tears in her eyes, but she kept them back resolutely.

"Thank God!" said her father, fervently, and then, with a sudden effort, he leaned forward and took her hand.

"'Toinette," he said, with a halting, yet feeble utterance, "if Taunton tells you anything about me, don't you believe it. I never meant to steal from him. He found a false entry in my books; but, I swear, I did not put it there—at least, I do not remember. But that is what he says. He says I cannot remember. Then I am not responsible, am I? A man is not a thief because he takes something when he is walking in his sleep—if he never meant to take it when he was awake."

A chilly feeling crept over Antoinette.

"Hush, papa!" she said, softly. "You are ill. You must not talk so."

"But Taunton says I embezzled the money," he went on, excitedly. "It was all there set down in my books; but, I swear, I know nothing about it—nothing!"

"Dear papa," she whispered, "you are dreaming. Come over here and lie down on the sofa."

He obeyed her like a child. She threw a rug over him and bade him go to sleep.

"Yes, yes," he murmured, closing his eyes again. "But if Taunton tells you, 'Toinette—"

"I will tell him it is not true," she said, quickly.

The door-bell rang.

"'Toinette, dear," called Mrs. Eyre gaily over the stairway, "here are your flowers from Mr. Taunton, and the loveliest after-dinner service in Trenton Belek from Mr. and Mrs. Stuyvesant. That makes two hundred and thirty-nine presents."

Antoinette did not stir. She was watching her father, who lay on the sofa with his eyes closed, breathing so lightly and slowly that he hardly seemed to breathe at all.

"O, God!" she murmured, "what is there in this world for me to live for? If I could die to-day instead of going to the altar—"

"'Toine'te," called Mrs. Eyre, shrilly, "aren't you coming to get dressed? It is ten o'clock."

She got up slowly and went to her room. Her mother had provided her with a maid, and she suffered herself to undergo a most elaborate toilette. Taunton's superb bouquet of Bride and Nephritis roses stood on her dressing-table.

"One dresses for a wedding much as one dresses for burial," she remarked, as the maid began combing out the golden lengths of her hair.

"What frightful notions you have, 'Toinette," cried her mother. "Where is your father?"

"In the library—sleeping."

Mrs. Eyre bit her lip.

"He will never be able to go to the church this morning."

"I hardly think so."

The door-bell rang again. Mrs. Eyre flew to the head of the stairs.

"What is it?" she called. "Another present?"

A messenger boy had brought a package for Miss Eyre.

"Put it down on the table," she said, carelessly. "I will open it presently."

"How can you wait?" exclaimed her mother. "I should think you would be wild to open it. What a queer little package! It is very small. It must be very valuable. I wonder if the Jennings sent it? They haven't sent anything yet, and I'm sure they ought to. When Blanche was married your father and I sent her a superb fish service in real Sevres. But people never remember those things. I wish we had it back now."

Mrs. Eyre went off after this, and left Antoinette to herself.

"You needn't stay any longer," she said, as the maid smoothed out the folds of her dress. "I am not going to put on my veil yet. Thank you—no. I will arrange my flowers myself."

Mr. and Mrs. Hannibal Hawkins.

BY BELLE C. GREENE.

No. 4.

MIS' GRIBBIN'S "AT HOME."—THE OMIS-
SION OF THE MISTER.

LUNKINVILLE was a dretful fashnerble place for a country town. There was some o' the folks that had relations in big cities, and so picked up a good many idees and notions about fashion and society, and they was silly enough to wan' ter try and foller soot in Punkinville. Consequently, pretty soon after Hannibal and me got home from our bridle toor, Mis' Jotham Gribbin, one o' the most promernent women in town, give out that she was goin' ter have a party, and in a few days our invitations to it come along.

This is what it said on the envelope:

"*Mis' Hannibal Hawkins,*"

and inside was a little square card with her name,

"*Mis' Jotham Gribbin,*"

in the middle, and down in the left-hand corner,

"*At Home. 3 to 6. P.M. April 4, 18—.*"

That was all, every identical word!

I read it and passed it to Hannibal.

He looked at the envelope and turned it over 'n over, and says he, "Hm! *Mis' Hannibal Hawkins!*"

I looked at it agin and sure enough, it did read jest *Mis' Hannibal Hawkins.*

"I guess, she must 'a forgot ter put on the Mister," says I; "or 'less she made a mistake."

"A curis mistake to make, and we jest married," says Hannibal, kinder grumpy; "I'm a good min' ter not go a step!"

"Oh, now, husband! how foolish!" says I; "she's naterally got a good deal on her mind—and besides '*Major and Mis' Hannibal Hawkins*' is a long mess to write. I don't believe she could git it all on this 'ere little envelope, if she tried; not in one line, anyway."

"Let her kiver the pesky little thing all over, then! She'd orter took a bigger one in the fust place!" snaps Hannibal.

Then he read the card out loud,

"At Home," what do you make o' that, Ruth Ann?" says he, lookin' wild. "Ain't folks ginerally to home when they give a party? Where in nater should they be? Nobody 'd think o' goin' ter Africy or the Sandwidge Islands ter find 'em, would they? Everybody knows where the Gribbinses live, if they know anything! 'At Home!' " he repeats contemptuous, "and see here! I'll be hanged if they hain't told us jest when ter go and how long ter stay! 'From 3 to 6. P.M.' We're expected ter leave at 6 o'clock precisely, I s'pose! Wall, I must say, Ruth Ann, it ain't much like the good old-fashioned hospertality we've been 'customed tew. We've ginerally been expected ter go when we got ready, and stay as long as we could—till mornin', if we was a min' ter, specially if there was dancin'."

I had ter confess that it didn't seem very corjul. She might at least a' said somethin' about "the pleasure of our comp'ny," it couldn't a done no hurt, and we should felt better; and besides, if we hadn't heard aforehand that she was goin' ter give a party, we shouldn't a knowd what under the sun she meant by her "*At Home.*"

"I conclude there aint goin' ter be no dancin'," says I, "the time is fixed so short, and seein' it's in the day-time tew."

"I wonder if they'll have anything ter eat? Bread 'n water'd go good with their skimpy invite," says Hannibal, sarcastic.

"Wall, we'll go and see, then we shall know all about it," says I, "and I shouldn't wonder if we had a real good time after all."

Of course I was dyin' ter find out what other folks thought o' the invitations, and what kind of a party they thought it was goin' ter be, and so on. You see, bein' a newcomer, I didn't feel like runnin' in intimit to the neighbors' houses yet, as I used tew at home. But I wan't kep' long in the dark, for the very next mornin', our nighest neighbor, Mis' Ezry Hackett, come drivin' in 'fore we got our breakfast out the way, and she was chuckin' full and bilin' over. She said how "them

invitations might be stylish, she presumed they was, all-killin' stylish, seein' Mis' Gribbin's daughter had been visitin' in Boston all winter, but cordin' to her way o' thinkin' they wan't corjul, nor they wan't civil!"

I spoke about the omission o' the "mister" on ourn, and she said theirn was jest the same, and all the rest she'd heard on, "and I dew say," says she, "that it leaves the men in a terrible awkward fix! It may be a mistake," says she, "but I should sooner think it's Boston fashion. You know how strong-minded them ere Boston women be, and mebbey that's one o' their women's right's ways of ignorin' and puttin' down the men. But I must say it is goin' a leetle tew fur. Men-folks is naterally sensitive, anyway," says she, "and I s'pose Major Hawkins feels it uncommon, bein' jest married, and so." She said she s'posed the easiest way ter find out about the hull thing would be ter go to Mis' Gribbin herself, frank and candid, and inquire, "but," says she, "Mis' Gribbin' is so mighty big feelin' and airy that there ain't a woman in Punkinville that would be willin' ter yumor her so much. No, we must go right ahead, as if we knew all about "At Homes," and went tew 'em every day in the week. She said if she found out anything more she'd run in and tell me. That very afternoon, in she come, all of a fluster.

"What do you think now?" says she, "Mis' Gribbin's neice told Mis' Deacon Laton, and Mis' Deacon Laton told me, that they wa'n't agoin ter take off their things at all ter that party! That the proper way for us ter dew is ter wear our bunnits, and keep 'em on! Did you ever! And *she says* we ain't expected ter stop no time at all—jest go in one door and pass out t'other, same's they do at funerals, you know! That's what *she said*. But afterwards I see Mis' Barber, and she told me that her Mariar met Serinthy Ann Gribbin down to the post-office yesterday, and in the course o' the conversation she let on that they was goin' ter have refreshments, cake and coffy, and now, if they be, they've got ter give us time ter eat 'em, hain't they? 'less we put 'em in our pockets ter carry home! I shouldn't wonder if the dea-

con's wife misunderstood; she's kinder hard o' hearin' anyway."

I'd been thinkin' the matter over calm and candid, and when Mis' Hackett got done, I says,

"Mis' Hackett, let other folks dew as they're a min' ter about this ere party; less you'n me use our common senses. Common sense is better'n Boston ettykett, or any other kind o' ettykett," says I. "Now, it says on this card, which is calkerlated ter be an invite to a party" (here Mis' Hackett smiled sarcastic), "it says 'from 3 to 6,' don't it?"

"Ondoubtedly it does read thus and so," says Mis' Hackett.

"Wall," I continuers, "I don't see how we can be fur out o' the way if we're there punctewal at 3 o'clock, and leave at 6 o'clock sharp. It seems ter me that would be strickly 'cordin' ter the terms of the invite, if not 'cordin' to ettykett. Hey?" says I.

"Yes, yes, I think so, sartfn," answers Mis' Hackett. "That percession business must 'a been all a mistake. Mis' Gribbin wouldn't have the face ter ask us to leave our work and take the trouble 'o dressin' up jest ter go over there and pass in one door and out o' t'other. Of course not, t'ain't reasonable," says she.

The next day was Sunday, and everybody was out to meetin', and I'm afearred there was more thinkin' about Mis' Gribbin's "*At Home*" than there was about the sermon. But Parson Alden, dear old soul, seein' us all so much more wide awake than usual, preached uncommon lively and arnest, and I heard him remark to Deacon Laton, goin' out o' meetin', that he did "have faith ter believe we was on the threshold of a powerful revival, for never in his durin' experience had he preached to a more interesteder and wide awake congregation than what he had that day?"

I felt 'shamed and conscience-smit enough, and I made up my mind on the spot that the dear old man shouldn't never have no more cause ter complain of me nor my folks for not keepin' awake, if there was any vartue in cayann pepper losengers and hunchin's. (I'm dretful apt to drowze in meetin' myself, and Hannibal ginerally 'lows ter put in half an hour's good sound sleep during sermon time.)

When we got home, Hannibal told me how the men-folks had talked over the matter of the invitations, out in the horse-sheds at noontime, and had 'pinted a meetin' at John Russell's house for a Monday night, ter take a vote, whether or no they should resent the omission of the *Mister* as an insult, or jest stay to home and mind nothin' about it, or go, or what? And every man had agreed ter think the matter over thurrer between whiles, and be perpared to vote 'cordin'ly.

I thought that was a very good way to settle it, and I felt pretty sure the majority would vote to go.

And they did. But some of 'em that lived quite a ways out of the village grumbled a good deal at the early hour set for the party to begin; said they "didn't think much o' leavin' their work right in the middle o' the day, as it were, and riggin' up and startin' out to a party. Why couldn't Mis' Gribbin have hern in the evenin', as other folks did!"

Hannibal and me, being jest married, was pretty well on't for cloes, of course, and we reckoned what was good enough to wear on our bridle toors in New York City was good enough for Punkinville. So we was all right; but some was consider'ble exercised and put out. Don't you know, some folks never have anything ter wear, no matter what the time nor 'casion is. Did you ever notice it?

The party was set for Wednesday night; and Wednesday mornin' Mis' Hackett run over in a great ter dew, and said that Ezry (that's her husband) had been down to the store, ter git him a new pair o' pantaloons to go 'long with his best soot, and he found the store full o' men, all after cloes—pants, vests or coats, or somethin'—and she said how that Mister Morse, the storekeeper, was most crazy, for he hadn't but jest two soots o' cloes in the store, and them wouldn't fit nobody; and Mr. Morse said, if he had knowed in time, he could a' sent ter the city and laid in a stock jest as well as not, and fitted 'em all out in shape. He didn't feel any wuss 'n the men did, you better believe; but, you see, we had all been so took up with the omission o' the *Mister*, that we hadn't thought o' cloes.

"Let 'em wear their meetin' cloes," says I ter Mis' Hackett; "what looks

well enough to wear ter meetin' orter look well enough for a party."

"I know it," says she; "ginerally speakin', it orter; but I guess likely a good many is jest in Ezry's fix: kinder 'between hay and grass,' and thinkin' their old cloes would dew till cold weather, they've got pretty shabby. I notice men aint apt ter buy new cloes till the edge o' winter or so."

Wall, they all had ter dew the best they could, I s'pose. Mis' Hackett she inked the seams of Ezry's pants, and pressed out the knees, and turned in the edges round the bottom where they was frayed out. But she got 'em dretful short; they did look redickerlous! I couldn't help noticin' 'em at the party. And there was a number o' men with theirn the same way. I asked Hannibal afterwards, if they couldn't a let down their galluses or somethin', but he laughed, and said there wa'n't ginerally much help for "*high water pants*." (That's what he called 'em).

There wa'n't nothin' the matter with Hannibal's cloes, any way. He made a noble 'pearance, if I dew say it, and I feel ter believe that I looked reasonable well myself.

Wall, Hannibal and me got ready, and stopped on the way for Mis' Hackett and Ezry, so 's ter go 'long with them. We rung Mis' Gribbin's door-bell jest as the clock was strikin' three.

"We're punctewal, anyway," I whippers to Hannibal, "and punctewality is a vartue, I don't care whether it's in Punkinville or Boston," says I.

Serinth Ann Gribbin come to the door, and spoke tew us very perlite, but I thought she 'peared kinder strange, someway. She says,

"Walk right in, ladies," then she turns to the men, hesitatin', and flustered:

"Er—Er—will *you* come in tew, gentlemen?" she says.

They did come in, of course, follerin' along behind us, and lookin' kinder sheepish.

Instid o' askin' us ter go upstairs and lay off our things, she opened the parlor door and took us right in there. Speakin' up quite loud, and bearin' on to the word *Mister* oncommon heavy, she sings out,

"*Mister* and Mis' Hawkins, *Mister* and Mis' Hackett!"

"But now they're here, they've got ter stay. It wouldn't never dew to mad 'em jest 'fore 'lection. You can see that as well as I can, if you ain't a gump and a fool!"

She grumbled out somethin' I didn't hear; then she says,

"Wall, s'pos'n they stay, who's a goin' ter feed 'em?" I haint got cake and coffy enough for this crowd ter *smellon*," says she, sarcastic.

"Leave me ter manage that," says he; then he says somethin' 'bout his *new barn*. (He was buildin' a barn at the time).

Not long after—say half an hour or so, Mister Gribbin 'peared in the parlor, and rappin' on the seraphim, sung out,

"Attention, ladies and gentlemen, attention!"

Then, when we was all still, he bows right and left, awful limber-jinted and graceful, and thus addresses us:

"Ladies and gentlemen—that is—neighbors—er—citizens o' Punkinville! I was—was hendered from gittin' home ter the party before, on 'count of—business, pressin' business. Consequentially our plans for the 'commodation and entertainment of our guests and guestesses haint been strickly carried out—not up to this pint, but you're *all here*," bowin' and rubbin' his hands and smilin', "yes, you're *all here*, and now, hopin' it it aint tew late, I take pleasure in perceedin' ter carry out my—that is ter say—*our* plans. Gentlemen, fellertownsmen and neighbors, will you walk out to *my new barn*? Mis' Gribbin will tend tew the ladies. Come on, gentlemen, this way; you all know the way!"

Oh, how they did skedaddle! Almost before the words was out of his mouth they started, heels over head, without sayin' boo to their wives, or stoppin' ter put on their coats and vests, so that in a dretful few minutes we women-folks was left in the house by ourselves.

Mis' Gribbin and Serinthy Ann was now different bein's. They invited us to lay off our bunnits and make ourselves perfectly to home, and we done so, and bimeby they brought in cake and coffy, and we eat and chatted and had such a pleasant time that when the clock struck six we couldn't hardly believe it was so late. Mis' Hackett and me we meant ter be punctewal ter go as well as ter come,

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so we was ready to start, but our men-folks didn't put in their 'pearance.

We waited some little time, and then I suggested to Mis' Hackett that we go over and see the new barn and so git our pardners. 'Cordin'ly we took our leaves of Mis' Gribbin and Serinthy Ann, and went over.

When we opened the big barn door, what a sight we see! Wall, ter cut a long story short as possible, Mister Gribbin had pervided imprompty refreshments out there for the men, consistin' of what odds and eends he could pick up at the store acrost the street; sardeens, crackers and cheese, nuts and rasins, and I dunno what all, *to eat*, and *somethin' ter drink*, besides, I can't tell you jest what, but that it was of an intostication nater I felt sartin' the minute I set eyes on Hannibal! When Hannibal see me, he got up off'n the nail kag he was settin' on, and come rollin' towards me.

"New barn! fine new barn, Ruth Ann!" says he, wavin' his arms in all directions like a win' mill, "fine new barn—and we're all goin' ter vote for Gribbin in November—every man on us, 'publicans and—and sinners! Hooray!" says he.

I stood there a minute leanin' up agin' the door and takin' in the seen. There they was, all in a similar condition to what Hannibal was, if not more than similar, and they was shakin' hands with one 'n'other, and blowin' and pledgin' themselves for Gribbin.

"We'll vote for Gribbin! Good feller—treated us like gen'lemen!" they says, and so on and so forth.

Yes, Mister Gribbin had managed to turn our blunder tew his own advantage, and I hadn't a doubt but he'd be 'lected come November by an overpowerin' majority! And, thinks I ter myself, "I dunno' but he deserves it, for he's done remarkable well (barrin' the objectionable nater of the drink he pervided).

I 'sisted Hannibal ter put on his coat and vest, and Mis' Hackett hunted up Ezry and done the same by him, then we locked arms with 'em, respective, and went home.

I haint never heard a word as to how Mis' Gribbin was 'fected by the success of her "At Home," but if she's a fair and candid woman I think she must see that Boston styles aint fit for Punkinville, and that plain country ways is best for plain country folks.

Left alone, she sat down a moment to breathe, and, half idly, she took up the little package which had so piqued her mother's curiosity. She opened the wrapper, and found a leather case, upon which lay an envelope containing a few lines, which bore no signature—"This book contains something which the sender begs Miss Eyre to accept as a wedding gift, with best wishes for her happiness."

She did not recognize the writing, and she opened the case in some surprise. It contained only a slip of paper; but that paper was the late agreement made between her future husband and the man who was now imprisoned for assault and battery, the paper for which Mrs. Tremaine-Blount had paid such a fabulous sum.

The color rose like a tide in Antoinette's face, and then ebbed away to a ghastly pallor. There were the signatures of the two men. She knew them both. Oh, how dared they treat her so! Was she to be bought and sold like a slave? Her eyes filled with angry tears. The shame and ignominy of it all overwhelmed her.

"They shall not do it!" she cried, passionately. "I will not suffer it."

Her head seemed to swim around. Taunton had accepted this money upon condition that he would renounce her; and yet Taunton was going to marry her. She could not understand it; but her heart cried out in passionate protest:

"No, no, I will not suffer it."

The clock struck eleven.

"'Toinette," her mother called to her, "Mr. Taunton is in the drawing-room."

She sprang up like a hunted deer.

"They shall not come in!" she said, fiercely, and she locked the door.

"Wait a moment, mother," she answered, and then she flew to the closet where her every-day clothes hung.

Mrs. Eyre was already dressed in a very splendid gown of ruby velvet. She swept down stairs in state, and stepped into the library. Mr. Eyre was still lying sound asleep on the sofa.

"Humph!" she said, with open contempt. "It is a good thing my brother Owen is here. There would be no one to take me up the aisle. He will never be able to go to the church at all."

She closed the door softly and glided across the hall into the drawing-room.

Taunton was there, elegant and immaculate, in a morning dress of fashionable cut, wearing a knot of violets in his buttonhole, and gloves of delicate lavender.

"Ah!" said Mrs. Eyre, touching his hand lightly, "you are prompt, Mr. Taunton."

"This is the proverbial eagerness of the bridegroom," he said, smiling. "Did you ever hear of one who was late?"

"Mr. Eyre will not be able to attend the ceremony," she went on nervously. "He is quite unwell this morning."

"Indeed? I am very sorry for that."

"The weather is most inauspicious."

Taunton shrugged his shoulders.

"All brides cannot have fair days," he remarked. "Is Miss Eyre—is Antoinette ready?"

"In a moment she will be. There is my brother."

"And the bridesmaids?"

"They will meet us in the vestibule."

Taunton looked at his watch. He was nervous, evidently.

"Don't you think you'd better ask her to hurry?" he suggested. "We have quite a long ride to the church."

Mrs. Eyre went up stairs again.

"'Toinette," she called, impatiently, "what on earth keeps you?"

There was no reply. She turned the knob, and the door opened. Antoinette's veil and wedding dress lay in the middle of the floor. The bride herself was gone.

Mrs. Eyre rushed down stairs, calling her daughter loudly.

"'Toinette, 'Toinette!"

There was no reply. Taunton and her brother went out in the hall.

"She is not in her room!" Mrs. Eyre exclaimed, and hurried into the library.

"'Toinette," she called again, dashing by the sofa on which Mr. Eyre lay; but something in the pose of her husband's prostrate form made her stop suddenly. His head was turned to one side, and his face was ashen pale. Mrs. Eyre took a quick step forward, and bent over him.

"'Toinette!" she screamed, "come here, your father is dead."

Then she fell, in all the splendor of her ruby velvet gown, in a limp, insensible heap upon the floor. But 'Toinette did not come. She was not in the house, and no one knew where she had gone.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Poisson d'Abril.
A FIRST-OF-APRIL STORY.

BY MARIAN C. L. REEVES.

AUTHOR OF "A WAVE OF THE SEA," ETC., ETC.

"Haul, boys, haul in, haul all night—
Don't you see de fish a-floppin',
Moony-white?"

"Haul, boys, haul in, haul all night—
Mistis want de shad and herrin'—
Haul in right!"

UNC' MOSE'S voice rang out all the more lustily, that he was doing very little hauling himself at the big seine, at which twenty of his fellows were tugging and striving.

Young Mistis, from her perch on a drift-log cast up by the tide on the wide beach, smiled and nodded approval to the old man's impromptu variation from the "Ship of Zion," "Miss Fanny Sweeping wid de Gospel Broom," and other familiar plantation hymns with which the busy fishermen accompanied their task of getting the fish ashore.

They had by no means hauled all night. Indeed, the night had so lately succeeded to the twilight, that there often lingered a faint golden streak behind the western trees and chimney-tops of Beaufort House and plantation quarter, while in the east the moon was putting silvery touches here and there about the witle, grey sound.

One of these touches caught the white sail of a sloop flitting in by the tiny pier; another of them tried in vain to creep beneath the long shed farther up the beach, where knots of dusky-turbaned women gathered, idly chatting about the tables, waiting for the herring to be dressed by their quick fingers. But the luckiest moonbeam of all was that which lay shining on the bright, uncovered head of young Mistis, and danced in her brown eyes, as she balanced herself on the slippery, seaweedy log, watching the splashing spray and the gleam of the trapped creatures, as they were drawn up the beach in the net's meshes between the two long rows of the black "hands."

"It's a great haul, Uncle Mose!" she said, as she jumped down from her perch,

and drew back, shuddering a little, for she nearly alighted on a pile of herring, slipping out of the net.

Uncle Mose grinned, and took a masterful grip of the slack meshes, as if he had had a great deal to do with the capture. But perhaps he is thinking of other days when he was accounted as a good hand. At any rate, young Mistis was, though she hardly remembered those days, for she gave him another nod and smile as she ran up the beach, meaning to strike into the homeward path behind the shed.

Just as she reached the shed, however, she saw advancing toward the other end of it a young man who, as the full moonlight showed him to her, in his traveling suit, with his wallet slung across his shoulder, was a stranger.

No one belonging to these parts was a stranger to Lindsay Beaufort: so it followed that this stranger must be what Uncle Mose would call a far-erner.

Lindsay drew back closer into the shadow of this end of the shed.

She whipped off the silk kerchief knotted carelessly about her throat, and tied it three-corner-wise over her head, pulling the fold forward to hide the roughened hair, with which the sea-wind had been taking liberties. A stranger would be naturally going up to the House; and if young Mistis was to guide him, she must look rather more sedate than the sea-wind would fain make her.

The stranger had by this time advanced midway up the shed, evidently glancing about him for a more responsible person to address than these staring, turbaned women appeared to be. But when he had passed the whole row, and found them much the same, with the occasional variation of a courtesy, he stopped before the last, whose ample proportions quite screened young Mistis in the background.

"Can you tell me how far to Beaufort Point?"

"He means the House, mammy," put in the girl from behind, seeing that the woman only dropped a bewildered courtesy.

She spoke so low that only the last word was audible.

Mammy had gone on to explain that Beaufort Point, "hit stretched all along about yer, two mile nigh about, down plumb into de Sound, whar de gemman mout a crossed de ferry—"

When the young girl struck in:

"It's not the beach, the Point, mammy, he is asking for; but the House."

"The house! Whose house?" inquired the stranger, turning immediately towards the speaker, who was only visible by a fluttering breadth of blue serge skirt behind mammy's ample person.

"The House," repeated Lindsay, with unconscious emphasis. "The House—Lindsay Beaufort's—over yonder."

"Then I am right. Mr. Lindsay Beaufort has written to invite me to call—Those lights yonder? Here, my good girl, if your mother will let you guide me; for I don't see any opening in the wood."

The moonlight glittered on a piece of silver in his outstretched palm.

But before the startled old nurse could find words for her wrath and her dismay, young Mistis, with a swift beckoning gesture of her kerchiefed head, and rolling her hands in her jaunty apron, had glided on before, to show the way.

It was, as the stranger had intimated, difficult to make out: a mere rift in the tangle of trees and undergrowth; but much shorter than the carriage-drive, which took a circuitous sweep below. He could not have found the path without the girl's guidance; and she flitted on before him so fast, without once turning round or pausing, that he had all that he could do to follow.

The house itself, a low, broad building, nestling among the great overarching live-oaks, had a cheerful look of invitation, with the lights shining freely from its many windows. Towards one of these, standing open like a door, down upon the gallery or long piazza, the girl motioned the visitor, as he gave her his card, and she herself vanished by another entrance.

She whisked through the small library into the dining-room adjoining, where a little old lady stood critically surveying the tea-table with its shining old silver, and no less shining old mahogany.

She nodded approvingly at the light bread and biscuits, the cold chicken and ham, while she went on piling up the translucent preserved figs in the cut-glass dish. Lindsay jeopardized both by catching her about the shoulders.

"Miss Patty, do you know what day it is?"

"What day it is, my dear?"

Miss Patty Lindsay set down the dish, thoughtfully.

"What day? Tuesday—"

"April the First—April Fool's Day!" cried the girl, triumphantly.

"Why, so it is."

"It has just dawned on me that it is, Miss Patty."

"And a good thing, too, my dear, that it did not dawn on you till sunset," the old lady was complacently beginning.

"If earlier—"

"Ah, but it is never too late to mend, Miss Patty. And I have my April Fool—my April Fish—safely landed in the drawing-room."

"What do you mean?"

"This." Lindsay spun the visitor's card on the table, where it lay with the name uppermost. "'Roger Parr'—a First-of-April Fish, a *poisson d'avril*, which is, you know, the French way of saying April-Fool."

"I don't know—" Miss Patty was beginning.

"Perhaps not; but let me tell you, out of my store of information as a fishwoman, that a par is a young fresh-water fish, and that this particular Parr is a particularly fresh and young *poisson d'avril*, an April-fool to the top of my bent. My dear Godmamma Lindsay, do you know what has brought him here?"

"Dear, dear! it is your California cousin."

"I suppose he is—of the fiftieth degree. And he has evidently taken Lindsay Beaufort to be a man. You often tell me my hand-writing is too masculine, Godmamma Lindsay; but don't you see, that in having me named for you, you are responsible for this whole mistake? When Roger Parr wrote that he wished to come to Beaufort Point, to see his cousin or cousins, unknown Beauforts, on a subject of importance, you thought the idea quite delightful, and encouraged me to answer

with an invitation. So now you needs must help me out."

"To be sure, my love. Anything that I can do—"

"You can go into the drawing-room, Godmamma Lindsay, and welcome your cousin to the house."

"My cousin?"

"Yes. He will have to be *your* cousin, as long as he stays at Beaufort Point. It is easy enough, Godmamma Lindsay; you won't have so much as a fib to tell; the servants call you Miss Lindsay before him, and all you have to do is just to go in and bid him welcome. Then you can see what is his 'subject of importance.'"

"And you?"

"Oh, I efface myself; I keep out of the way until he is gone. It won't be long."

"Not so long, probably, as if Miss Lindsay were your age, instead of mine," Miss Patty said. "But, seriously, you foolish child, you know I will do no such thing."

"Ah, but you will! There, there, Miss Patty, only until to-morrow, then. It is such a harmless bit of April-fooling! Until to-morrow, dear Miss Patty, good Miss Patty!"

The girl knew very well how to wheedle her old friend and guardian. Let to-morrow take care of itself: Lindsay would have her way to-night. As for to-morrow, she could go over to old Dr. Morgans, and then—for the good name of Carolina hospitality, Miss Patty would play out the part she was cornered into, and never tell the guest his hostess had run away from him.

So, after various coaxings, she saw Miss Patty on the way to the drawing-room; and she herself slipped round to a certain jessamine-draped window, where she could peer in, and see the young man's start and obvious confusion, when the dainty little old lady came forward to shake hands with him.

"And he said never a word of his subject of importance," Miss Patty declared, when the girl had stolen across to her room, for a good-night chat, before the bright wood fire: the cousin being safe from overhearing, in the big ground-floor guest-chamber.

Lindsay shrugged her shoulders care-

lessly; then suddenly flamed up with a flush that was not all the doing of the leaping firelight. What if, after all, that silly idea which had flashed across her mind, to be scoffed at, were true; what if the "Mr. Lindsay Beaufort" were a blind, and the far-away cousin wanted to be "more than kin" to the young heiress of Beaufort Point?

Well, well, no matter. Miss Patty said he was going away to-morrow morning.

Perhaps it was the brilliant sunshine, the brisk sea-wind of that morning, which overshone and blew away the little cloud of displeasure in Lindsay's mind. At any rate, she relented so far as to say to herself that though she would be absent, there might as well be flowers on the breakfast-table, as the jessamine was out in all its golden glory, and there were dogwood blossoms to be had for the seeking in the woods. She was returning thence with her hands laden, when she came full upon Roger Parr, at a turn in the path.

He stared at her for one bewildered instant, then caught both her hands, regardless of jessamine and dogwood.

"My cousin, Lindsay Beaufort!"

She would have understood it better had she known that just a moment ago, by the well-sweep, mammy had stopped to speak to him, before she toted her bucket across to her cabin in the quarters.

* * * * *

But Lindsay never did understand about that "subject of importance," until she was no longer Lindsay Beaufort, but Lindsay Parr.

For the subject of importance was Roger's discovery of an old will, by which the Beaufort Point estate had been devised to the California branch of the family, through Roger Parr's great-grandmother, Beaufort.

As Lindsay supposed, Roger had imagined his correspondent to be a man.

Finding, as he next believed, that she was a fragile little old lady, he had been going away without one word about his claim.

But bonnie Lindsay was worth claiming, for her own sweet sake.

"However, I caught my *poisson d'avril*, after all," she said, when he told her the whole story.



A Year in the Home.

APRIL.

BY AUGUSTA SALISBURY PRESCOTT.

THE soft, spring days have come and the season is at hand when a change in temperature suggests the opening of doors and windows to the balmy air. Yet the spring loveliness is not altogether appreciated by the careful housewife, until she has gone through the semi-annual upheaval known in the annals of home duties as "house-cleaning."

It seems folly—sheer folly—to do much buying at this period, or to indulge in any more scrubbing and renovating than is really necessary to clear the house from suspicions of mustiness, and to remove traces of the furnace dust and dirt that have been unavoidable. Even to do this is no light undertaking; for each nook and corner must be cleared and exposed to the sun and air before it can be pronounced ready for summer use.

An experienced housewife was asked what she considered the best disinfectant for closets, clothes-presses and out-of-the-way corners. She unhesitatingly replied, "Hot water, soapsuds, air and sunshine." These, thoroughly applied, are sure destruction to dirt, germs of all kinds, and even possible vermin. But it is not always practicable to reach every nook with these remedies. After walls have been swept, the woodwork washed and the room aired, there will often lurk cracks and crevices that do not seem to have been reached by the cleansing wand.

With hard-finish floors and well-fitted base boards, there is scarcely any thought of lurking evil. But with the old-fashioned pine board floors, sporting wide cracks throughout the length, and having broad interstices at each edge of the base-board, it is scarcely safe to replace carpets without taking a few precautionary measures against beasts and flying things. Carpet-bugs may lurk, moths may have made their entrée, all unsuspected, and, in this land of constantly-changing domestic service, even worse evils may have found entrance.

Should moths or any of the bug family be discovered, they must be routed at once and thoroughly, or they will cause in-

finite trouble. Many remedies are advised that are neither harmful to materials nor poisonous in themselves. A hot iron applied to the reverse side of carpets will thoroughly kill all germs therein. Rugs, draperies, etc., that have no reverse side may be treated to a steam bath by holding a hot flatiron, covered with a wet cloth, half an inch above the surface. The same treatment is advised for floor cracks and base-boards.

If the presence of vermin is suspected in beds, a thorough washing is advised, after which the cracks should be filled with yellow soap, carefully worked in. This need not be applied to the outside where it will be conspicuous.

These disagreeable duties once done, the housewife can turn her attention to pleasanter ones—the re-arranging of curtains to conceal their defects, and the re-disposing of carpets to bring out their best points.

With the summer dust in mind, and the thought of possible summer absence from home, it seems better to bide with the old possessions until fall, rather than bring in new to become houseworn before the season when it can be really enjoyed and appreciated. By a little ingenuity and forethought, the old may be made to appear very well, indeed.

The carpet that seemed scarcely able to survive the winter, may be given a new lease of life, by facing the faded breadths at the sides, and putting the best ones where they will show most. Or, for summer use, the old carpet may be ripped apart and the best pieces sewed into a large square rug for the center of the room. The floor underneath, be it ever so common, may be made presentable by a couple of coats of prepared floor paint, with wax finish, that comes for this purpose. To prevent the carpet-made rug from rolling up at the corners, tack it, face downward, upon the floor, and moisten the back, letting the rug remain until it has thoroughly dried. The edges will now lie flat as long as a scrap of the rug remains.

It is rarely economy to have window-shades laundried, as they stretch and shrink so unevenly as to be almost past recall. But soiled ones will last another season if turned end for end, so that what was the soiled lower edge will be upon the roller. Faded curtains may be also turned upside down and reversed, putting the best sides and edges where they will be most seen. If the curtains are badly worn, sash curtains may be made from them, or short curtains that reach down from the top of the window, just far enough to be tied back with pretty ribbons.

Wherever possible, heavy curtains, draperies and hangings of all sorts should be banished for the summer. Not only will lighter ones be more comfortable, but the heavy ones will be spared the dust and will seem newer when brought out in the fall. It is also a good plan to put away for the season plush and velvet furniture, if it can be spared from the home furnishings.

To replace these possessions with something that shall have the appearance of furniture and be comfortable withal, various devices are resorted to. Plain benches, similar to those used for wash-benches, or to hold flower pots, are treated to a coat of white enamel, and cushioned thickly, to make comfortable couches. Old, wooden rockers, wooden-seated chairs and common stools are treated in the same way. In place of "stuff" lambrequins, matting is placed across the upper third of the window opening and slightly decorated. For portieres, the pretty bamboo and bead combinations are hung. Or, if thicker ones are desired, blue denim is effective and cheap.

The bamboo portieres, if made at home, are quite inexpensive; the only materials required being some glass beads of all sizes and colors, and strips of bamboo, from half to three inches long. Now, with these at hand, provide yourself with a stout needle and some coarse cord. Cut the pieces of cord the same length as you wish the portiere to be, fasten them upon a rod the width of the door, and then—string. If only a very little taste is used in combining beads and bamboo, the result will be surprisingly pretty.

Stenciling is a new way for the busy

fingers of home-makers to occupy themselves. To stencil a plain wall, or to beautify an ugly wall-paper, cut a piece of card-board into a convenient size for handling, and then make slits in it to form the pattern that one wishes to produce. Lay the card-board upon the wall and go over the openings quickly, with gold, or other paint. When the card is removed, the pattern will be found nicely outlined upon the wall. Care must be taken to keep the pattern straight each time the stencil begins a new figure.

Very nice enamel paint can now be bought in any color at a low price. With this, old picture frames may be made new; and old furniture, so badly marred as to seem past recall, may be made presentable.

There is a pretty conceit in the manner of sofa cushions. These are now made in two stories. Two cushions of contrasting color and material are placed one above the other, and tied at the four corners. One recently seen had a lower cushion of blue denim, and an upper one of white bolting cloth. This was to be used upon a sitting-room couch. Another one had a lower cushion of silkoline, while the upper one was of China silk. A little sachet powder, introduced into the linings of these, keeps a little fragrance hanging about them as long as a rag remains. A good combination to endure, retaining its scent, is made by combining violet and heliotrope.

By thus contriving and making the most of what she has, the home-mother may find that her furnishings will do very nicely until fall.

In cleaning, a little ammonia softens water so that it removes dirt readily. Someone calls it "the housewife's maid," so useful is it in all kinds of cleaning. It brightens glass, polishes brass work, takes out finger-marks, and, when grease is to be removed, acts like magic. All through the spring cleaning it is well to bear in mind that all extra work may be left until the fall cleaning, as it will be more enduring then. In the spring, only the necessary things are to be done. And even in doing these, moderation must be used. A little at a time, upon the brightest, warmest days, may save from a heavy cold or exhausting over-exertion.

Nora's "Crave."

BY ADA MARIE PECK.

THERE is an atmosphere of cultivation and refinement at Rosmoyné, and its inhabitants, especially those of the gentler sex, are devoted to science and art. In short, culture is the "open sesame" to most Rosmoyné doors, just as those doors are the entrance-way to houses, built or remodeled in the Elizabethan, Jacobian or Queen Anne style, with mullioned or diamond-paned windows and tessellated floors.

Starlight evenings, the ladies of the town are to be seen in groups, tracing constellations and looking for new asteroids, while on sunny afternoons there are hurrying couples of them, equipped with baskets and hammers, intent on geological discoveries. The finding of an extinct crustacean is more of an event in the life of a Rosmoyné girl than is a proposal of marriage—that is, it occurs oftener; and so engrossed are they with their pursuits that, should you ask one her age, she would abstractedly reply, "Ours is the Devonian age."

It seemed a pity that the young men of the town should not appreciate all this intellectuality, and that Joe Brayton, one of the leading gallants, should have become sated with culture and have gone to the neighboring village of Silverton, where beauty predominated over brain, and paid court to pretty Nora Wilne. Having wooed and won her, he took her to Rosmoyné and made her mistress of a pleasant home. But it was like transplanting a gay exotic into an old-fashioned garden of grim monkshood and prim bachelor's-button's, of melancholy mourning bride and solemn rue—the new atmosphere chilled her. She felt that she was deficient in culture, and that her lively ways made her appear undignified; and, having been accustomed to the girls of the period who played tennis and thought the young men perfectly lovely, she felt at a loss among those young ladies who discussed protoplasm and evolution as they sauntered along, and who, if they stopped upon the street, stopped to congratulate each other upon the discovery of a new

planet. The acme of her "set" in Silverton had been to possess the largest calling acquaintance and the most elegant visiting gown. Had you said "trilobite" to them, they would have asked with a well-bred stare if it was good to put in salads, and the discovery of a flaw in somebody's character interested them more than any constellation. So poor Nora was to be pitied rather than blamed.

But about this time there was a revival at Rosmoyné—a revival of art instead of religion, and painting was the all-absorbing theme. Large classes were formed, the members ranging in years from four-score to four; oil, water-color and china painting were all taught. Nora's attention was first called to the prevailing mania by overhearing a conversation on the cars. Four young ladies sat *vis-a-vis* just in front of her, and were talking in an earnest and animated manner, paying no attention to the quartette of students opposite.

"How different from Silverton girls," she thought. "Their conversation must be intensely interesting, else they would be flirting with those college boys opposite."

It was something like this: "Caledonian brown, permanent blue, burnt sienna—wonderful effect—an exquisite butterfly—a sky like a dream—oh! the loveliest china plate! Such a background! The perspective was—a bug and a bee—the middle distance—Corot, Millet"—Chorus: "Oh! oh! how heavenly! Such feeling, such form!"

Now is there a woman whose curiosity would not have been aroused? So, when all were at the station, waiting for the five-o'clock train at night, Nora asked one of the young ladies if she had seen anything new in dress goods.

"I haven't been in a dry goods store to-day," she returned; "I have lost all interest in the fashions."

"The reason I inquired," said Nora, apologetically, "was because I heard you talking of different colors and designs on the way out."

"Oh," replied the young lady, laughingly, "those were paints; we are all

painting; it is perfectly delightful; much pleasanter than crotcheting. Why don't you join the class?"

"Thank you for the suggestion, but I haven't the slightest knowledge of drawing; I never could learn."

"That doesn't make any difference. Come next Thursday. Good-by."

"Joe," said Kitty, immediately upon her return home; "I am going to take lessons in painting. Everybody paints, and I am not going to be out of the fashion."

"Take lessons in painting!" he repeated. "Why you haven't any talent; you do not know even how to sketch."

"Oh, that doesn't matter, they say; and if I haven't talent I have lots of taste: don't you know I always have the dearest, sweetest bonnets and hats—"

"No doubt about the 'deariness';" said Joe, dryly; "but I honestly think you'd better devote your spare time to your music—then you could accomplish something."

But mistress Nora had her own sweet will, purchased an artist's outfit and joined the painting class.

"Well, what have you been doing to-day?" asked Joe, as Nora came in with beaming face at the close of an afternoon's lesson.

"Oh, I've begun a dozen things! I am copying the loveliest landscape—they say it is after one of Corot's, all soft greys and greens; you can't tell where the sky begins or where the foliage ends—"

"And very likely, like that picture of Turner's, you can't tell, when it is finished, whether it is upside down or not."

Nora pouted a little, and continued: "Then I am doing a lovely drapery and the sweetest sachet, and I have worked in a still life with burnt sienna and turpentine. Next time I shall begin a study after Landseer."

"I once saw a fine picture of a dog, after Landseer," soberly remarked Joe.

"Would it be nice to copy?" eagerly asked Nora.

"Yes, very. It was a ferocious looking mastiff, in full chase, after the artist's heels."

"You have no appreciation of art," said Nora, loftily, turning to leave the room.

"Come, let us have our tea," called Joe; "men must eat, if women do paint."

In the course of the meal, as Nora was volubly running on about the class, Joe took courage to further remark, in reply to her question about a suitable name for the class, "I should call it the 'Flyer,' as it seems to be your aim to accomplish in a week what the old masters were a lifetime doing."

If Joe seemed unappreciative, he really was a true lover of art, and mused over his after-supper cigar something in this fashion: "Goethe says, 'The art which furnished to the ancients their pavements, and to the Christians the vaulted ceilings of their churches, fritters itself away in our day on snuff box lids and bracelet-clasps.' In other words, on 'draperies' and 'sachets.'"

Mistress Nora became completely absorbed in her new accomplishment. The class days occupied the best part of two days of the week, but that was not enough; she must needs paint at home, and was rarely to be found away from her easel; when, with a palette on her dainty thumb, her pretty golden hair rumped, and a smirch of paint on her soft, pink cheek, she painted everything, from portraits to pudding sticks. Meantime Bridget had full swing, and devoutly hoped that she would paint forever. But, poor Joe! Dinners in which sour bread and tough steak predominated—Nora had no time now to concoct delicious desserts—breakfasts of oily coffee and leathery puffs, began to tell upon his digestion. He was in despair. He wished his pretty little wife to be happy, and she seemed supremely so; he could not bear to scold her; what should he do? That very day he had asked her for the third time if she had sewed a rip in his glove.

"No," she replied, "I have been too busy with my butter plates."

"Thank goodness!" thought Joe, "she is at last becoming interested in household affairs again."

"What was the trouble with the butter-plates?" he asked encouragingly; "did Bridget allow them to accumulate?"

Nora's blue eyes opened very wide. "Bridget! why she has nothing to do with them. What do you mean? I am talking

about those china butter-plates I have been painting. Let me show you one. Don't you think it is lovely?"

"No, I do not," gruffly said the disappointed man; "I think it is abominable," and went out, slamming the door. Nora pouted a little, then painted faster than ever.

"It's more than human nature can stand," soliloquized Joe one Sunday morning. Nora had gone to church alone, and Joe was tumbling drawers, looking vainly for stockings that were not ragged, and shirts that were not buttonless. He selected the best pair of hose and put them on, but as the toes were so worn that only a few threads remained, the effect was much as if he had put on a pair of his Aunt Prudence's mitts. He used some expressive language, then searched for needles and thread to sew buttons with.

Thinking of Aunt Prudence's mitts put an idea in his head.

"By Jove—I'll do it!" he exclaimed; and, going to his desk, wrote as follows:

"DEAR AUNT:—Cannot you make the long promised visit immediately; Nora has a craze, and I am a wretched man. I think, though, that your judicious advice will help to mend matters. Come without delay.

Your affectionate nephew,
JOE."

Two days after, Joe received a telegram from his aunt, to the effect that she would be at Rosmoyné at six that afternoon.

He gave the message to Nora, who said:

"How queer! I wonder that she has not written that she thought of coming. I shall be glad to see her, only I hope I shall not be obliged to give up my painting lessons."

"Oh, she will entertain herself," returned Joe, carelessly. "But I warn you that she is an eccentric spinster, and that you must not be astonished at anything she may say or do. Perhaps she will even make suggestions about your housekeeping. I hope you will not be offended in that case."

"Oh no," replied the good-natured Nora; "I shall only be too glad."

Joe met his esteemed relative at the station, but was somewhat astonished at

the sympathetic squeeze she gave his hand, and at the tears she shed, as well as at her words.

"Oh, my poor, unfortunate boy! How long has she been so? Is she raving?"

"Who been! how? What do you mean, anyway?" asked Joe, incoherently.

"Why, your wife! You wrote that she was crazy."

"You misunderstood—I wrote that she had 'a craze,' " and Joe laughed so immoderately that everybody looked and wondered what there was so mirth-inspiring about the thin, elderly lady he was conversing with.

On their way home, he explained Nora's "craze," and the forlorn condition of his house and wardrobe, saying that he thought she would, in time, recover from her mania, and that he hoped his good old aunt would in the meantime look after affairs, as well as bestow some good advice.

This calling upon a third person, to regulate the wheels of his domestic clock-work, would have been an unwise proceeding on Joe's part, if he had not known the adjuster to be possessed of skill and good common sense; as it was, he had all faith in satisfactory results.

Nora found herself perfectly free from restraint—she could pursue her study of art to her heart's content. In fact, Aunt Prudence so took care from her, that she had nothing but her beloved pursuit to occupy her. Then, too, the good old aunt formed an interested audience of one; and Nora raved, by the hour, of middle distances, of perspective, of *chiar-oscuro*, of Flemish and other schools of painting—her listener inwardly commenting:

"I believe she's going stark, staring mad; such gibberish I never heard in all the days of my life."

"Oh, aunt!" Nora exclaimed one day, "I wouldn't wonder if you had an old stone churn. Is there one at the homestead?"

"I believe there is one up in the garret."

"Can I have it?"

"Have it—yes. But what in the world can you want of that old churn?"

"I want to paint a snow scene on it, and fill it with swamp grasses, teasels, milk weeds and—"

"See here, Nora Brayton," interrupted Aunt Prudence, holding up her hands in horror; "don't you go to making up any such heathenish mess as that. Why, you will be poisoned to death! If you want a strengthening syrup, just stew up sarsaparilla, yellow dock and wintergreen, and put it into bottles. That old churn couldn't be made air-tight, and as for painting it—that I call sheer extravagance."

"O, dear!" laughed Nora, in despair, "I wasn't going to cook them. I was going to make them into a large bouquet."

"Surprising taste," said Aunt Prudence to herself; then aloud, "Have the churn and welcome, and perhaps you'd like the old butter ladle," she added, facetiously.

"Why not?" returned Nora, eagerly; "everybody makes use of every old thing they can get hold of, and I do believe that, with a group of Jersey cows on one side and a cluster of buttercups on the other, it would be perfectly lovely."

"Then there is my grandmother's pudding stick—it's old—" and a satirical smile hovered around Aunt Prudence's mouth.

"Just the thing," declared Nora. "I could decorate it and suspend it from the wall with a ribbon, and it would be a most unique ornament. How kind you are, Aunt Prudence," and she gave her an affectionate hug, while the good aunt again said to herself, "surprising taste," and further thought that Joe was near right when he thought about her "craze."

So Nora's brush flew faster than ever; the house was filled to overflowing with the productions of her "art" work and the result of her ingenuity. Really good engravings and choice bric-a-brac were ruthlessly put aside to give place to the gorgeously framed squares of canvas she rapidly turned out, and to the various articles she decorated. How long affairs would have gone on in this way, or to what height of absurdity Nora's mania might have led her, we shall never know; for Providence and Aunt Prudence interfered. Providence brought Joe's friend and classmate, Dick Phillips, back from a prolonged European tour about this time, and Joe came to dinner one day

saying that he had asked him up to supper.

"Nora," he said, with hesitation, "hadn't you just as soon take some of those kickshaws out of the parlor? Phillips is something of a critic, and having just returned from a long tour abroad, your—ah—productions might seem a little crude to him."

Oh, but wasn't mistress Nora indignant. "Kickshaws!" her lovely little gems stigmatized by that vile name! She informed her better half that if she was not the most forgiving of women his friend would have but a sorry supper that night.

The guest arrived in due time, and was so courteous, so affable, that Nora and Aunt Prudence were enchanted with him. He talked of music and art, and Nora thought, "here is an appreciative man—I do wish Joe cared more for art." Then, as he seemed to look around the room with admiration, it was with reluctance that she made her excuses; but it was nearly supper-time, and she must see that Bridget had everything in order. Pausing in the hall to arrange some displaced article, she saw him adjust his glasses and go to the mantel, and heard him say to Aunt Prudence—"Is this your work?"

"Oh, no; those are Nora's. Such an ingenious woman! We used to call that a plate in my day, but now it is a plaque; those things on them are meant for birds."

"Indeed!" said Phillips, with a curious inflection.

"Then that bottle is not French at all. It is," said Aunt Prudence, lowering her voice confidentially, "just one of my old hot-drops bottle covered with satin; and those fat babies on it belonged to Saint Anthony—suppose he adopted 'em," she added, smiling grimly.

"Very likely," and Nora could see that Phillips was shaking with suppressed laughter. While this cold-blooded description of her artistic ventures seemed to strip them of all pretensions and place them before her in their reality, her face flushed, her ears burned and tears of mortification filled her lovely blue eyes.

"Just come into the hall," continued the incorrigible aunt, "and I will show

you what Nora calls her 'oriental vase ;' but between you and me," lowering her voice again, "it isn't any such thing ; it is my old stone churn painted up to fits." Then Nora fled into the dining-room, while Aunt Prudence concluded by saying, triumphantly : "Now, don't you call her the most ingenious woman you ever saw. And so economical—so many pretty things at so little expense!"

"Yes, indeed," replied Phillips, still with his curious rising inflection.

And poor Nora crouched in the corner of the dining-room, sobbing bitterly ; then she wiped her eyes, set her pretty little teeth together, and murmured something about Aunt Prudence which did not sound exactly like a benediction. It was a bitter awakening—she had hoped for praise, else she would not have listened, and, instead, heard only that ambiguous "Indeed!" It was humiliating, this seeing herself, or rather her works, as others saw them. Then the tears flowed afresh, until Joe, who had returned from an unexpected call to his office, found her and comforted her as a loyal husband was bound to do. She washed away the traces of tears and presided over the supper-table

in the most graceful manner, and later in the evening was prevailed upon to sing ; and her sympathetic rendering of their guest's favorite songs elicited so much sincere praise that she quite forgave Jim for not appreciating her painting, and remembered what Joe said about her applying herself to her music.

Nora passed a wakeful night, but made many resolves, and acted upon them the next day. The engravings and photographs were put back in their places ; there was a judicious weeding-out of decorated articles—the piano was opened, the music sorted over, and some dainty work placed in a basket ready for the evening.

Joe's amazement was unbounded ; but he was too wise to comment, save to say that he had the most pleasant and cheerful home in all Rosmoyne, and, by all odds, the prettiest and most charming wife.

A few days after, Aunt Prudence, seeing all these changes, said to Jim, with a twinkle in her shrewd, grey eyes :

"Seeing as Nora begins to act like a rational woman, guess I will go back to the homestead."



The Missing Will.

BY OLIVE BELL.

THE bright sunshine fell on the ivy covered walls of a rambling stone house—the old homestead of the Wycherly's—lighting up its long narrow windows until the diamond-shaped panes were solid blocks of fire. The curtains were drawn down to exclude the garish light, for the weather was unusually warm for April, and there was a brassy tint in the clouds that promised greater heat; but the wide oaken doors stood open to let in the fragrance of spring flowers and fruit blossoms that filled the languid air.

The earth was beautiful with the perfection of spring loveliness, blended with the dawning colors of nature's painting; maples, just touched with crimson and green; meadows tinged with the faintest verdure, while every brookside was aflame with bloom. Far as the eye could reach around Wycherly, wide fields of corn were planted and ready for the genial sun to bring to perfection, and the leaves of the trim osage hedge that enclosed the orchard were already turning green.

Up and down one of the cool aisles of this orchard paced a woman, the sunlight sifting through the apple-boughs over her soft black garments and uncovered head.

She was not young, for the brown hair was sprinkled with silver; but her face was so quietly tranquil and cheerful, one loved to look at it and catch a glance of the luminous hazel eyes.

This was Hester Braize, companion, nurse, almost daughter, to the garrulous old man that a few days before had been carried out to his last resting-place in the Wycherly vault. Hester had been the comfort of his old age, and he had often assured her Wycherly should be hers.

"I've no child of my own, Hester, and you've a better right to it than my scapegrace cousin," he said, one morning, shortly before his death. "One of these days I'll tell you where to find my will."

But Azrael came to him very suddenly one lovely morning, and before the night fell, the kind old eyes that had never left Hester's face, when he was stricken speechless, were closed forever.

No trace of his will could be found, although Hester and the family lawyer searched the old house from garret to cellar.

"He never destroyed it," was the puzzled attorney's comment, "but he has doubtless put it where it will never see the light. This is bad for you, Hester."

Hester made no outward sign of disappointment, but in secret she mourned bitterly. Wycherly was very dear to her; besides, she had not a living relative of her own, and she was not qualified to earn her own livelihood. Homeless, penniless, and alone—what was she to do in the future? was the burden of her thoughts, as she paced the grass, with down-cast eyes that saw no beauty in nature. Hester loved every rood of the picturesque grounds, and her eyes filled with tears, as she gazed on the many familiar objects—objects endeared to her by many tender memories. Reaching a low fence that separated the orchard from a narrow strip of pasture land, where myriads of dandelions dotted the ground and raised their heads in the golden sunshine, Hester saw through her fast-gathering tears a large Devonshire cow coming slowly towards her, the kind, sleepy eyes resting on her sad face, with an almost human gaze.

"Bounty!" cried Hester, with a half-sob; "O, how can I leave Bounty!"

Bounty quickened her pace, and at last thrust her nose into Hester's outstretched palms. She stroked the wrinkled old face—for Bounty was twenty, if she was a day—patted the silken coat lovingly, and catching the hugh horns in her slim hands, leaned her pale face against Bounty's forehead and took, what we women value as a safety valve to over-charged brains, a good cry.

"I would give them everything, Bounty, if they would only let me keep you!" Hester said, as she raised her face and looked earnestly into the humid eyes. Unconsciously she began to polish, with her handkerchief, a wide brass band that encircled one of the huge horns. She remembered how, years ago, Mr. Wycherly had sawed off one of Bounty's horns, and then replaced it, with this brass band to hold it firm. As old age crept on, and the frail old hands grew almost useless, he would rub this bit of brass with a chamois skin until it shone like gold.

"Hester," he was in the habit of saying, "never part with Bounty; she is a valuable cow."

And Hester had often remarked, that he never drove Bounty out with the rest of the herd, daughters and granddaughters of the handsome Devon—but kept her in this shady pasture lot, or a wooded enclosure across the brook so brightly outlined by its margin of golden-rod. Bounty had been fed, curried and attended with unusual care by the feeble old man, and the remembrance of his strange passion for the animal brought another rush of tears to Hester's eyes. The only intelligible word he had uttered when his illness struck him, was "Bounty," and with the tears coursing down her cheeks, and an intense longing for affection of some kind; Hester climbed the fence, put her arms around Bounty's neck, laid her cheek against her smooth, plump shoulder, and cried to her heart's content.

"Halloo! crying, Hester!" cried a cheerful bass voice; and Hester, starting guiltily, lifted her face to meet the amazed gaze of jovial Dr. Reaburn, who had been the Wycherly physician for years, and never saw a shade of care on Hester's placid brow before; and here was tears, actually tears!

"Well, well," he began, as he slowly climbed the fence, "I never expected to see your bonny eyes red with weeping."

Hester blushed in spite of her thirty years, and vigorously dried her eyes.

"I—I—," she stammered, growing redder than ever, "I was just taking leave of Bounty. You know I leave here to-morrow."

"And where are you going, pray?"

"I don't know," was Hester's truthful reply, for she had no definite plans; "but I suppose I'll find a place in the world."

Dr. Reaburn looking very grave, and not a little troubled, sat down on the grass and looked up at Hester Braize, who stood beside Bounty, with one arm thrown over the animal's neck. He saw the downcast face flush slowly under his earnest gaze, and thought in an abstracted way, what a tender, womanly face it was, and how firm were the full red lips, that seemed formed to utter only words of strength and sweetness. He thought of his motherless boy of twelve—a wild rollicking lad, who was the terror of the household—and then a sudden inspiration seized him, and jumping to his feet he stood before Hester, a little flushed and very eager:

"I've got it, Hester!"

"Got what?" broke in Hester, as he paused, as if ashamed to go on.

"The place for you—you'd suit it exactly. Be a mother to my Willie."

Hester's hazel eyes opened wide in astonishment.

"You don't mean to say you would marry me?"

"What else could I mean," with a nervous laugh. "I am willing, if you can care enough for a cranky old fellow like me to take me."

His arm went over Bounty's neck, and Hester's slim, brown fingers were caught in the clasp of a warm, plump hand and squeezed a little, while the hazel eyes looked down to hide their gladness.

"Care for you! Why, doctor, I always thought you the best of men."

"Now, that's fortunate!" chuckled Dr. Reaburn, "for that's just the opinion every good wife should hold of her husband. So you'll have me, Hester?"

"On one condition," smiled Hester, "that you buy Bounty from the new master of Wycherly."

"Oh, I'll do that willingly," was the doctor's delighted promise; for although his proposal had not been the outgrowth of any sentimental feeling, he had a sincere regard for Hester's good qualities, and expected a peaceful, happy life with her. After this, they both sat down on the grass, and there were plans laid

mingled with a touch of love-making, with Bounty's great solemn eyes looking on.

When Hester parted with her future husband, he left a kiss on her red lips, and a luminous light filled the hazel eyes with a look of content that was to leave them nevermore. One week after they were quietly married at the Wycherly parsonage; for the new master had taken possession of Hester's old home, and Dr. Reaburn was in haste to see her mistress of his disorderly establishment. Younger brides may have entered on their conjugal life with more enthusiastic ideas of what that life was to be; but few, if any, ever carried as tender, true, or as loyal a heart into a husband's home as did Hester Braize.

The new owner of Wycherly generously donated Bounty as a wedding gift, little dreaming that by doing so, he was giving away what he loved best in the world—wealth and position.

Hester's matrimonial life would have been without a thorn but for Willie Reaburn. Totally untrained, except by his father's mild counsels, Hester found him up to his ears in all manner of mischief. He took an unaccountable dislike to Bounty, which led to many an altercation between him and his step-mother. She was never severe with him, for he had many lovable qualities, and her affection for her husband was now so great that Hester would endure a great deal for the father's sake.

By a systematic course of teasing, Willie kept Bounty—usually the gentlest of animals—in a fever of excitement. She would toss her horns angrily at the laughing urchin's approach, and after the first few attempts Willie found that to ride mamma's wedding gift was a feat hard to be accomplished.

"I'll ride her yet—mind if I don't," was his oft-repeated threat, a threat which Hester listened to with grave doubts, for his life might be lost in the attempt to fulfil his boast.

"Who put that brass band on Bounty's horn?" was a question that Hester was called to answer one crisp morning in October.

"Mr. Wycherly," heaving a sigh as she looked down at the rosy, dimpled

face, and thought how pleasant it would be to have this rollicking lad in the grand old rooms of Wycherly.

"What for?"

"I cannot tell you. It was an old man's whim."

"Well, I'm going to knock it off, horn and all."

The boy stood with his hands in his pockets, one eye on Hester and the other on Bounty, who was quietly grazing in a wooded enclosure near by.

"You?" Hester looked her astonishment.

"Yes, me. You think I can't do it, don't you?"

"I hope you will never try, Willie," said Hester, coaxingly; for direct opposition always angered him.

"Well, maybe I won't; but I think I will," said the boy, as he darted away, scudding across the lawn with his favorite dog at his heels.

Later in the morning, when the doctor was far up in the country looking in on a patient here and there, and Hester was in her pleasant kitchen, deep in the mysteries of quince preserves, an enraged bellow, mingled with cries of fear, startled Mrs. Reaburn, who hurried out of the house to see her pet Devonshire making frightful plunges at a staunch plum tree, where her step-son had taken refuge.

"Bounty—Bounty!" screamed Hester Reaburn, rushing toward the enraged animal, who was wild with pain, for one glance told Hester—the brass-rimmed horn had been knocked off at the very root. "How did you do it?—you young rascal!" cried Hester, dragging the frightened boy from his perch. "Bounty—poor Bounty!" patting the cow's bleeding head with the hand she slipped through the opening in the fence. "You cruel boy—how did you do such a thing?"

"With this!" Willie held up a stout poker, for now that the danger was over, and Bounty was quieting down to a few angry sniffs, he was as bold as ever. "I just coaxed her up to the fence with corn, and then—whack! away went the horn!"

"Where's the horn?" Hester glanced around curiously.

"O, it bounced ever so far. There it is!" shouted Willie, pointing to a clump of burdock.

Hester went through a small wicket-gate into the pasture-lot, patting Bounty's sleek sides as she passed by and picked up the horn, from which a few drops of blood were trickling. The brass band had been loosened by the blow and came off altogether in Hester's hands. In the upper part of the horn, where the hollow had been scraped out and thoroughly cleaned, was a small roll of parchment which entirely filled up the cavity.

Hester's heart gave a great bound. What—if this should be the will?

"Come, Willie," she said, as she came back through the gate, her face wearing such an odd, puzzled look that Willie obeyed without an objection—an equally odd proceeding for him. He followed his step-mother into the cozy sitting-room, where a bright fire and tempting lunch awaited Dr. Reaburn's home-coming. Tears welled up into Hester's eyes, as she sat down on a low rocker and gazed at the folded parchment. If it was not the will, it was *something* the loving old hands of her adopted father had placed there for some good purpose; and laboriously she drew it out, only to cry out in delight:

"Willie, you blessed torment, it's the lost will!" and laughing and crying by turns, Hester hugged the child, until he thought she had lost her senses.

"What's all this?" cried Dr. Reaburn's cheery voice; "Hester, are you going crazy?"

"With joy, John!" Hester put her arms around her husband's neck, and laid her cheek against his. "You took a poor, penniless girl to your heart. Now, you will share Wycherly with me, for we've found the will in Bounty's horn."

"God bless me!" ejaculated the doctor. "The man was always queer; but who would have thought of looking for it in a cow's horn."

Great was the amazement and chagrin of the owner of Wycherly, when Hester was reinstated in her old home. And no happier home can be found, for Willie—now a fine, manly youth—never wavers in his love for Hester, or grows weary of recounting the exploit that gave "mamma her fortune—out of a cow's horn."

And Bounty, carefully housed and tended, breathed her last in the Wycherly stables.



A Wheel of Fortune.

BY OLIVIA LOVELL WILSON.

Author of "A Legal Fetter," "A Social Dagger," "Luck of Ashmead," etc., etc.

IX.

SYLVIA ATTAINS HER INHERITANCE, AND UNCLE PERRY SEES GHOSTS.

"The verdict in the strange case of the Eldridge inheritance was reached in the courts to-day, and much interest was displayed by prominent lawyers. The court decided that as Mr. Eldridge was naturally more robust, having greater vitality than his wife, and being able to swim, therefore his chances of surviving his wife were most probable. The immense estate passed then to his heirs, Miss Sylvia Wendell being the sole representative. Miss Wendell is the only child of the late Curtis Wendell, well known in the scientific circles of New York. She is also a niece of Uriah Maythorne, of Avon. Her inheritance is a regal one, and as her face is as fair as her fortune, Rose Lynn will have a brilliant future. Miss Wendell was in court to-day, and was the focus of all eyes."

Thus read the *Brompton Courier* and several local papers. Sylvia herself had only a few confused memories of the strange day that made her mistress of Rose Lynn.

She had maintained a pale reserve on the subject of the inheritance, in the days intervening between her last words with Walter Denmead and the decision of the court. She opened her heart to no one, but suffered in silence the mortifying memory of her mistake. She could not blame anyone for what she felt was her own stupidity. Everything indicated Denmead as "the prig of a brother" referred to by Robert.

Her life at the Maythornes had become so unbearable that she resolved the breach must come, should she receive the inheritance or not, and after a decisive battle with her uncle, she came one day to Serepta's lodgings and begged to stay with her, until the question of the inheritance was decided one way or the other.

Mr. Bowman had found this change exceedingly gratifying, as it was but a short walk from his cousin's place, Elm-

wood, to the edge of the village, where stood, first Miss Serepta's lodgings, kept by Miss Letitia Verger, and adjoining it the small "farm," so dignified by its owner, Mr. Halsted.

Mr. Bowman's visits were quite frequent, and it is doubtful whether Mr. Marchant was conscious how deeply interested his cousin was becoming in the calls that had caused him so much perplexity. For Bowman was too wise to openly oppose his cousin by advocating Sylvia's cause. Mr. Bolter, the father of Junior Bolter, appeared in Sylvia's interests.

Sylvia's apathy upon the subject of her prospects was overlooked by Bowman in his own enthusiasm, and, although Sylvia had learned to like him heartily, she would look at him sometimes with such searching candor in her eyes, that Bowman was abashed. He knew he had no regard for her that was cheapened by his higher regard for her future wealth and position. Junior Bolter was much annoyed at Bowman's repeated visits, and his youth was such that he did not fail to show his chagrin to Sylvia. But she was shrewd enough to feel that Bolter had always been just a little ashamed of her in her plain gowns as Uriah Maythorne's poor relation, and had paid his court surreptitiously; it was only since Avon had known her as the heiress that he had openly become her devoted squire.

Mr. Halsted was much pleased with Sylvia's removal to Serepta's lodgings, for he had never been easy since she had received the blow from Mrs. Maythorne. He was lamenting daily the expectation of losing the "farm," and it was pitiful to Sylvia to see him patting old Trot, or surveying his pigs and cow, with fond eyes, and shaking his head over his future at the Town farm.

"Fur I'm too old to work, Sylvie. Who'd want to hire *me* by the day? I'm a broke down old critter, and if it hadn't been fur Jack—but poor lad, he never meant it—and he's dead now."

And at the memory of the nephew who

had wrecked the little pile he had laid up against this "rainy day," while Perry brushed his arm across his eyes, and fell to whittling a small stick industriously. The neighbors always knew Uncle Perry was "down" when he commenced to whittle, but were equally positive he would come out philosophically cheerful, having "whittled it off."

One incident of the day at court remained with Sylvia long afterward, a brief glimpse she obtained of Walter Denmead. He came toward her with Mr. Marchant, as she stood between Mr. Bowman and Serepta Ann, talking with an old friend of her father's. She saw there was a change in Denmead's bearing. He looked haggard, and the peaceful gaze had given place to an alert anxiety. As he approached, his eyes met her's in a mute challenge. She felt her color rise, and turned to ask Mr. Bolter some trivial question. In another moment she would have given a large share of her fortune to have recalled the silly question, for Denmead turned away and left the room. She felt he had only appeared in court to speak to her. She fathomed his motive the moment she saw him, but, by her quick embarrassment, she had checked the words she had longed to hear.

"Was not Mr. Denmead with you?" she ventured to say to Mr. Marchant.

"Yes. He is triumphant at what he terms the course of justice. He was coming to speak to you, but seeing you engaged, left his congratulations with me. Since we are neighbors, you must bear no grudge against me, Miss Wendell, for my part in to-day's controversy."

"I hope I owe no one in all the world a grudge," she said, with such a troubled glance that Marchant felt she referred to Denmead.

"Do not feel anxious about Denmead. He is just a little rattled lately, but it's in regard to his own affairs and Miss Carstone's illness. He is most sincere in his good wishes for you."

And then Sylvia gave him a glance, that sent Louis Marchant away growling at himself for being fool enough to think he could understand all women, because he had loved and married one.

And now Sylvia had been mistress of Rose Lynn for three months, and nothing

had resulted as she had hoped. Serepta Ann Carson had refused to become her companion. She had scruples Sylvia had never dreamed of encountering.

"Even did I contemplate the salutary effect of such a life, on my own well-being, I could not refrain from commending to you, in the spirit of truth, someone more fitted by age for the position you desire me to fulfil. But I cannot consent, dearly as I love you, Sylvia, to forget my independence and liberty."

So Sylvia, at Mrs. Marchant's suggestion, had installed a gentle old lady, one Mrs. Luff, a former governess at Elmwood, in the position of housekeeper. Mrs. Louis Marchant was the soul of comfort and kindness, at this time, as was Mrs. Myddleton. Both ladies vied with each other in a quiet way, to keep the lovely girl who had secretly won them by her frank manner, even had Robert Myddleton's regard for Sylvia had no weight with his mother. And another touch of balm to Sylvia's troubled spirit, was the way in which she had won Faith Carstone over to see what would make both Mr. and Mrs. Myddleton more content. Faith was improving very slowly. She depended upon Robert more every day, and when he gently ventured to suggest a return to college to finish his last year, which was of course valuable to him, she had given way to violent weeping, and was so much worse that the doctors had forbidden the subject being broached again. But the memory of it seemed to remain with the sick girl, who was able now to be dressed every day. Robert would then carry her into the library or living room, and she would lie quietly gazing out of the window, talking little, but ever seeking Robert's glance or touch. He had grown already to speak in the low tones of a sick-room, and his dark eyes were growing as sadly pensive as his mother's. One day Faith asked if Sylvia would not come to see her. She asked it suddenly, after making Robert talk of her for about half an hour.

Sylvia went gladly, and after that every day found her at Faith's side for a short visit, and it was not long before Faith knew the whole story of Sylvia's intentions and longings, although she carefully concealed much of her acquaintance with

Walter Denmead. For aside from not wishing to distress Faith, she was very shy of even thinking of that walk home in the moonlight.

"But you *can* help me more than by giving me money, Sylvia," said Faith wistfully, when they once more talked over Sylvia's benevolent but impracticable scheme.

"How can I help you, dear? I am *so* tired sometimes when I think how little good I can do—how worthless my life is. I have no one near or dear to love me. I am very lonely, Faith."

"So, was I—until I met Robert," said Faith, "but I—want *you* to help me give him up—Sylvia."

She spoke slowly, twisting her fingers nervously.

"Why, Faith, dear, what makes you speak thus?"

"I—I—am ruining his life. I *must* let him go back to—to—college. Don't you think I should?"

Something in the appealing eyes, the restless fingers made Sylvia hesitate. Then she knelt and pressed her rose-tinted cheek against Faith's pale face.

"Dear Faith," she whispered, and Faith knew all her tone implied, and a silence fell, in which both felt the triumph of a life victory.

Faith told Robert that night that he must return to college. She said nothing of the second wrench for which she felt she as yet had no strength for herself and him.

But while she lay so still and white, and saw all that went on about her with the vision of an re-awakened soul, Faith Carstone was trying to resolve that no shadow in which her life must rest should fall on the man she loved. Even in the blinding tears that filled her eyes when she saw Robert and Sylvia together, there was a victory greater than that over jealous fears.

So Robert went back to college after many promises from Sylvia, which she faithfully fulfilled by her daily visits to the sick girl.

Sylvia's life now became a very busy one, for society soon made its demands upon her; and, although she refused many invitations, thinking it only right she should remain very quiet for the first

six months out of respect to her cousin's memory, she was invited to many quiet meals by the leading families of the county, and found herself of no little importance in Avon.

Besides, she had entered earnestly into a thorough understanding of the business of the estate. Mr. Marchant was chosen by her as her lawyer, to the disgust of Mr. Bolter and his son, and the chagrin of Edward Bowman. But the latter concluded probably this was a good arrangement "for the present."

Among other matters that engrossed Sylvia was the building of some cottages, and tearing down of some miserable tenements in the northern part of the town. And in doing this, she had tried to find houses for the families rendered roofless by her undertaking. She was shocked to find so many poverty-stricken people in Avon, and quite forgot all her own small vanities and delight in spending her money in the work of making comfortable homes and inquiring into the lives of her tenants. She found that intemperance and sloth were mainly the cause, and while she felt she ought to trouble her brain by striving to solve the problem of prevention, she went bravely into the houses with only the comfort of her purse and kindly sympathy for the hard working mothers. Her bright words and interest seemed to carry a message, however, that soon made her beloved.

But all this time she had heard little of Denmead. Faith once or twice had shown her his letters, but Sylvia felt a reluctance to read them even when asked to do so. One day Faith was fretful, and she burst forth with much vexation about "Walter's foolish ideas."

More than once she had shown an inclination to depreciate her brother's qualities, and as little as Sylvia knew him, it roused a desire in her to defend the man, whom she felt *she* had always misconstrued.

"That Walter was not like Robert," was Faith's continual cry. Sometimes Sylvia got very weary of Robert's perfections. To-day she said quietly: "Is not *one* Robert Myddleton as much as the world can sustain? There must be a few Walter Denmead's to vary the monotony."

Faith looked surprised and said:

"But you do not *know* my brother."

"And do *you*?" asked Sylvia, but grew so rosy afterward that Faith only watched her silently and said irrelevantly:

"You are *so* pretty, Sylvia."

But Sylvia observed that Faith never spoke of Denmead again in that tone, and for some unaccountable reason, she was glad of it.

In October, however, Sylvia went one day into one of the cottages and found the baby of one of the women ill unto death. After holding the child and trying to comfort the mother, she sent Dr. Drew down to see the babe. He came back to her in alarm.

"My dear Miss Wendell," he said, "the child is very ill with scarlet fever. It will probably not live three hours, the rash is all driven in by cold and exposure. You have run the risk of disease."

"I do not think it will harm me," said Sylvia, and she went back to the mother and stayed until the child died. The fever spread through that district, and Sylvia went daily thither with all she could find that would help or comfort the sufferers. Mr. and Mrs. Myddleton were full of keen anxiety for her, and the wildest tales of her services in those lowly houses were afloat in Avon. When it was all over and the quarantine was lifted, Sylvia came down with the fever herself. But contrary to all expectations, she had it very lightly, and recovered rapidly. Mr. Bowman, who was in an agony of apprehension during this period, was among her first visitors, but Sylvia refused to see anyone until her strength was fully restored.

One day late in November she rejoiced in being able to once more drive her pretty ponies, and was bowling along the road at a very rapid rate when she overtook Mr. Bowman, walking. She drew up to the roadside and he was at her side in a moment, glad of such a glorious opportunity of being with her. She was looking very lovely, with the cool air fanning the roses to her cheeks, and the glad light of recovery in her eyes. She was rather glad to meet him, she said, as she had missed Mr. Marchant at Elmwood, whither she had gone to consult about lifting the mortgage from old Mr. Halsted's place. She had been on the point

of arranging the affair when taken down by the fever. Bowman was able to give her all the information she needed, and then she relinquished the reins to him, and leaned back, smiling at his pleasant conversation.

But as they climbed a short hill she saw walking ahead of them a tall stalwart form, and there arose in memory the shadowy moonlight and the scorching tears that refused to fall and bring relief to her mortified pride. While Bowman was turning a sentence cleverly she was resolving she would, at least, show Walter Denmead she was bearing him no foolish ill-will. So when they passed him she bowed, with a bright smile, and it had hardly left her lips before the thought that he might think she wished to be patronizing made her shudder and hate herself.

"Why! is *that* cad here again?" said Bowman.

"What constitutes a cad?" asked Sylvia, meditatively.

"A cad—well—a man that is always grave when *you* want to laugh—always going the opposite way; and, in fact, laughing ingenuously, it is the fellow who is invariably right, when you are wrong. Now, Louis is a most abominable cad. Always has been!"

"Your cousin, Mr. Marchant?" said Sylvia, with an interrogation that equalled an exclamation.

"Yes. He is so much better than I am, that I have to retaliate in some way, so I call him a cad."

"Oh! I see," laughed Sylvia. "Then I like cads!"

"And you do not like me? This is discouraging. However, look in the encyclopædia and you *may* find a definition that will suit me, better than Louis or Denmead. There is a variety, even in cads."

"I am quite ready to believe it," said Sylvia, with such a twinkle in her eye that Bowman roared at his own expense.

But he soon got into a more serious strain, and before the ride was ended he had succeeded in telling Sylvia in the most quiet and sincere way that it was the hope of his future to win her high regard.

Sylvia had long felt the winning qual-

ity of Bowman's nature, and more than all else in his favor had been the impression he conveyed of profound respect for her. No touch of the hand or quiver of the voice had betrayed his stronger feeling. He was too keen a practitioner in the school of love and its gradations not to weigh Sylvia's young spirit in a correct mental balance.

As Sylvia looked at him calmly in the face to-day she thought him the most perfect gentleman she had ever met. She did not realize that her own frank unconsciousness had even served as a check, and helped preserve the balance in his great show of deference and delicacy. Bowman felt that no badinage or flirting would win Sylvia Wendell. She was touched by the courtesy of his address, and where a warmly avowed love would have set her questioning her own heart, she now gave a quiet assent to his appeal, that he might strive to win a higher regard than that of friendship.

"You have already been a kind friend to me. If it is possible I should like to know you better and give you *all* you ask," she said quietly. And Bowman left her at Rose Lynn, and strode home in a state of exultation.

But Sylvia turned the ponies about when she thought Bowman out of sight and although it was late sped down to Mr. Halsted's cottage. The sun had left a broad band of red about the horizon, and the air was quite chilly. Sylvia entered Uncle Perry's house unceremoniously, having gotten a small boy to hold the ponies.

Perry was sitting at a table covered with papers; opposite was a window, half open, the curtains fluttering in the air.

About the floor was a litter of chips, and an abandoned jack-knife and small stick indicated that Uncle Perry was "low in spirits," and was seeking to "whittle it off." He sighed deeply as Sylvia entered. She stole quietly to his side and, kneeling on a little stool near the table, put one arm about his neck. She looked so lovely kneeling thus, with that sweet, grave light in her eyes, that Uncle Perry started as if he thought he was entertaining an angel unawares.

"What is grieving you, Uncle Perry?" she asked as he started a little "Eh,

Sylvie? You here, my dear? And all so fine in your pretty gown, and hat and plumes. I always liked hen-feathers. But I'm in the *downs*, in the downs. I've been a calculatin' what Trot and Sukey will realize."

"But Trot and Sukey shall never be sold."

"Why, perhaps you'll buy 'em, Sylvie," he said brightening. "There is Trot would make a first-rate kerridge horse. He is a bit given to string halt, but it lets up after a hard spin; and Sukey is a good keow."

"No, I mean, Uncle Perry, that *you* are to keep the farm. I am going to lift the mortgage to-morrow and give you a clear title, or whatever they call it," and Sylvia drew away from him to smile triumphantly.

To her surprise a look of pride swept over the old man's face.

"No, Sylvie," he said, "I can't no-wise consent to *that*. I am an old man, but I am honest. You must not pay *my* debts, child."

"But, Uncle Perry," cried Sylvia in dismay, "don't you love me? Are you not willing even Sylvia should help you? Oh, for shame, to be so proud!"

"Don't you know, Sylvie, when a man's old, he has only a few things left to cling to. I ain't got much, but I can't accept no favors from you." He paused looking into the girl's clear eyes.

"Well," he said, "bein' proud afore *them* eyes seems a mean sort of virtue, but its *there*, Sylvie, its *there*," striking his chest, "and I've got it."

"Oh, Uncle Perry!" Sylvia spoke sorrowfully, and bowed her shining head, "hen-feathers" and all, on his knee. Uncle Perry laid a caressing hand on her shoulder awkwardly, realizing vaguely that he had wounded her, when he suddenly saw a figure at the window. A tall thin man looked in, and as the face disappeared, a silencing finger was laid on the lips. Perry started up.

"Sylvie—" he gasped—"see—see—a ghost—as sure as I live—a dead *man*."

"Uncle Perry!" cried Sylvia, aghast at his terror, "you are ill. I see nothing. No one is there. I will call."

She went to the window leaving him staring after her, and trembling.

"No one is here. Come, dear Uncle Perry, you are nervous and tired. Tomorrow we will talk of this again. Only let me ask you one thing."

She made him sit down, and folded his trembling hands in hers.

"If you knew Jack *could* come back and be forgiven, would you not forgive him?"

"God knows—yes," he said.

"And you loved him better than you love *me*, of course. But if Jack could pay you back the money wouldn't you be *glad* to have him say, 'Uncle Perry I am *so* sorry, but take this and forgive me,' wouldn't you take it?"

"Yes—yes—I—wanted to see him once more. But he is dead—drowned off Floridy."

"Yes, poor fellow! But *I* have not injured you, and you have nothing to forgive me; you *say* you love me, yet you refuse to let me give you the money. Don't you see how cruel you are to poor

Sylvia? do you want me to think you do *not* love me?"

This subtle, womanly logic was beyond Uncle Perry, especially to-night. He kept watching the window, and seeing his agitation, Sylvia talked soothingly awhile and then departed, not a little sore at heart over the non-success of her mission.

Uncle Perry watched her drive away, and then turned slowly once more toward the window. It was slowly raised to its full height, and a tall man stepped over the sill into the room.

Uncle Perry shrank against the wall, his face working nervously.

"For God's sake what do you want? Jack—Jack—you're dead—dead—and drowned."

"If I am, you should be all the more pleased to see me," said the other coolly. "I am the liveliest ghost *you* ever saw, and very hungry. Do you hear?"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]





Our Baron, or Anherst Hall.

BY MYRTLE MYRRICK.



WE were all gathered together, on the wide, grassy lawn, in front of "Mirian Chateaux," impatiently awaiting the arrival of the three huge carriages that were to convey us to "Anherst Hall," a distance of fifteen miles,—when sud-

denly I heard a most terrific and prolonged splash—sh, just behind me, and, turning around, I saw a sight which literally convulsed me with spasms of laughter. Royal Adair—prim, starchified, dude-like Royal Adair lay sprawling headlong in a miniature lake (that had been constructed near the center of the grounds), and with frantic endeavors was attempting to extricate himself from his watery predicament; while eyes, nose, and mouth were streaming with the "soiled moisture," and his usually smooth locks looked like tangled seaweed in its grimy dampness. With a final, desperate splutter, he succeeded in drawing himself out. He looked up, or rather down at me with an appealing, nay deprecating expression in his light-brown eyes, as he emerged from the pond, imploring me, I could see, in mute eloquence, not to draw the attention of the rest of the company to his forlorn appearance; and, indeed, he presented a most abject picture of despair, as he stood dripping wet, his spotless linen hanging in wet folds around his neck and wrists; and his face ludicrously smeared with daubs of mud gathered from the depths of that miserable pond.

"Miss Eloise," he murmured, and a sickly smile faintly illuminated all that was visible of his terribly dirty face,—
"I fell."

And after disclosing this startling and too apparent fact, he subsided, evidently too much engrossed in his ludicrous appearance, and too sorrowfully absorbed in his bedraggled condition to continue the conversation; while I was wildly employed in forcibly jamming the whole of

my immense handkerchief into my most capacious mouth, to keep the hysteric gurgles of laughter down, that they might not reach his ears, thereby inflicting mortal offense as he was a comparative stranger.

After contemplating himself for fully two minutes with anything but complacency,—while in the meantime I had grown red as a lobster, from suppressed breathing, and threatened every instant to burst a bloodvessel,—he added, apologetically:

"I stubbed my foot on this stone," and as he spoke his eyes fell on the offensive cause of his consternation.

"Wretched stone!" I cried, "to cause such a downfall."

He blushed furiously, and stammered something about appearing before the ladies in such a plight; but I assured him they would only consider it a good joke, after which comforting remark I charitably offered to assist him in bettering his deplorable condition. But he did not appear much consoled and thankfully declined all offers of assistance. "You are not half as wet as you might be," I ventured by way of consolation, as with rueful countenance and faltering steps he followed me to the rest of the group who had gathered some distance off; and, just discovering our absence, were lustily calling our names, having observed the carriages a short distance away. When we arrived, they were all comfortably paired off and packed in, that is, save we two, my escort, and Miss Gray, who was poor Royal's special charge, and, after a few moments delay, we were rolling merrily on towards Anherst Hall. I had not intended coming that morning, because Edward, my Edward (not yet exclusive property, however), had telegraphed our delightful little hostess at the last minute, that it would be impossible for him to accept her invitation, as he was obliged to meet a very unexpected and important business engagement; so, of course, I was thrown out of an escort. At first I was wildly indignant, and vowed I would not go a step, notwithstanding the affectionate little note I had received, saying how sorry he

was to disappoint me, and hoping I would enjoy it all, etc.—notwithstanding dear little Mrs. Cassaire's gentle urging and the girls' frantic pleadings and declarations of "the party's being spoilt without you," I had decided not to go; but, after due consideration at my rash words, seeming utter disregard of all conventionalities and of my hostess' feelings, I finally dried my tears and consented to form one of the number; and Baron Breton, stately, dignified Baron Breton has been won over by our little chaperon, and is to be my escort. There! I forgot to tell you, we have a real, live baron among our crowd, and he is quite delightful. Proud to have him as an escort, you will say? Well, yes—a little—although my bump of reverence for such "lordly characters" is not as fully developed as some people's are (yet, I confess, for this chivalrous truly "gentle-man," I possess an undue amount of respect); still I accepted him as a matter of course, when he came to me in his grave, quiet way and asked if I would permit him to accompany me that afternoon; but, you see, I knew he had not thought of going, had even declined a previous invitation, although sweet little Mrs. Cassaire plead very earnestly only a few short hours before. I had overheard him tell her (saw them in the garden, though they did not dream it), with a grave smile that he had not many fancies, or superstitions, but a "spectre-like castle," such as Anherst Hall was reported to be, held for him a strange, nay, fabulous amount of terror, and then his face relaxed, again assuming the almost stern expression so habitual to him. But the moment he heard of my Edward's non-appearance all the "old-time gallantry," for which he was so famous, rose to conquer his trepidation; and it was then he came and proffered his services in so gentle a manner. But was it imagination? I thought the muscles of his mouth worked strangely when he spoke of going and a pained look seemed to flit for an instant from the kind gray eyes; then—pshaw! I thought to myself, I certainly have a very brilliant conception of character if I imagine Le Baron afraid of ghosts! You will wonder at my admiration for Le Baron, as we were wont to call him; but, truth to tell, we all liked

him. He was only five-and-thirty, but really seemed much older, because of his reserve and dignity. He appeared "so much like a delightfully antique picture of the chivalrous long ago sprung to life," as merry, madcap Madge Clayton had mischievously said, declaring (her blue eyes sparkling with mirth) that she was all but in love with him herself. She was a bright little sprite, barely eighteen, and full of life and spirit; but we were accustomed to her *jeu d'esprit*, and knew she was in jest—knowing equally well, as we thought, that our Baron had never been guilty of falling in love, as he had always been unobtrusively, charmingly gallant to all without betraying the slightest partiality for any, although ten years before a very improbable and decidedly romantic story had gone the social rounds, in reference to him—a "hopeless attachment," "bitter disappointment," etc., etc.; but the lady had died, and it had been so long ago that they had really forgotten her name, if they ever knew, and, as a usual nine days' wonder, it had faded away; and now it was the universal and settled opinion that Le Baron had never experienced that "master passion" called love. However, he was the first invited to any delightful entertainment that was gotten up, and although he could never be persuaded to take a prominent rôle in any of our fêtes; we all felt the incompleteness of the affair without him. We had known him for half a decade of years, and he had ever been the same, true, noble man that had first won our esteem—then plain Mr. Victor Breton; it was since that time he had won the title of Baron. As I said before, we had known him for five years; but for the last two of that number he had been abroad, and indeed we had missed him sadly. It was only a month ago that he returned, "Just in time to make a delightful acquisition to our already delightful little circle," as our charming little hostess had prettily expressed it. You see, we were all spending our four weeks away from "city life," at Mrs. Cassaire's beautiful little country-seat, and, with she and her liege lord for host and hostess, the time had flown like the wind, and this was our "last day but three," as little Madge had regretfully said, twining her arm around my neck

and lifting a very pansy-like but decidedly woeful little face to mine. Yes, our last day but three, and Miriam (we six girls called her so "for short," and the boys, compromising between the long Mrs. Cassaire and the former, fell upon the happy medium and addressed her, with mock solemnity, as Madam C.) sat with her dimpled chin planted in her soft pink palms; and conjectured and thought until her face looked a pretty puzzle, and two wee frowns had formed themselves upon her fair forehead. A score of plans had presented themselves for this particular day, and been as speedily rejected as unfeasible, or not likely to sufficiently amuse her guests; but presently a merry light flashed from the soft brown eyes, and, jumping up, she exclaimed, "Ellie! (short for Eloise) 'I have it! I have it!'" and dancing around for fully five minutes, and performing quite an inconceivable reel, she once more composed herself and explained her enchanting little project of visiting "Anherst Hall," which terminated in our being ensconced in our carriages and rolling rapidly toward the "spectre-like castle." For you must know that idle stories were afloat, telling of mysterious, shadowy figures, clothed in snowy, ethereal garments, that had been seen flitting to and fro in the old ancestral halls—of dim lights flickering with anything but an earthly glare, flashing this way and that past the arched windows, swaying uneasily in the dim, uncertain darkness that swathed the courts and towers of this antique structure. Ancient? Not yet a century old; quite infantile, in fact, compared to some of those old "round towers;" and gossips said the place was still furnished, with all the appointments, elegant and gorgeous (though not as late, perhaps, as those of our day), that had combined to make the old place lovely at the time of old Baron Anherst's death, which had been some ten years before. They said that his only daughter and heiress, Lillian Anherst, had removed, soon after his death as she had no near relatives, to a foreign country, taking with her but a single servant, her old nurse, and they had subsequently heard of her death. Anyway, she had never returned—of that they were positive; and ever after, idle talkers delighted

in speaking of the old tower as being infested by ghosts, hobgoblins, and numerous other canny and unearthly objects. But, my!

For two hours and a half we rode along over the smooth, well-kept road, never dreaming we had been half that length of time, and I for one was almost sorry when we came in sight of our destination. I was passionately fond of "scenery," and the wild, fantastic groves and glens, the purple hills and autumn-dyed wood through which we had passed, possessed for me an inconceivable charm; and to increase my interest Le Baron's low, gentle voice had every now and then broken the stillness, drawing my attention, in his quiet way, to some pretty little "outlook" from a certain point, or a bright little clump of scarlet berries that grew just near the roadside; and one time he ordered the carriage stopped, and, getting out, had gathered me a beautiful tuft of crimson and golden-hued autumn leaves, which I took great care should not be crushed in my long carriage-ride. He smiled as he noticed my evident solicitude for their safety, and offered to take care of them for me, saying, at the same time, you are fond of all this natural glow and beauty, are you not? Then, without waiting for a reply, he continued—It is, indeed, charming; and turning again, he looked out over the dim, gray hills that formed a ragged background to the brilliant coloring that garnished their time-worn sides. We had ridden for fully fifteen minutes in silence, and my companion seemed so absorbed in the outer world that I hesitated before speaking, fearing that I would interrupt him. I was saved the trouble, however; for I heard him murmur softly, as if speaking to himself, "Ah! How it has all changed." I was surprised, and spoke before I thought. "Changed!" I queried in astonishment; "I did not know that you had ever visited 'Anherst' before, Baron." (We were then in the park that skirted the grounds, nearly a mile distant from the castle proper). He started, and, coloring slightly, answered, "Yes, Miss Eloise, I have; but it has been a long time since then," and he turned around with his face toward me, and we talked of other things, until we were finally disturbed by our carriage coming to a stand-still. We

all hastily alighted, and immediately began our day's ramble, although the sun was already high in the heavens, and it must have been near noon.

What a time we had wandering over the heather-bound dells, gathering wild mosses and lichens, tinged with the blood-wreaths of death, culling the silver "grey-beard," whose sheeny softness was faintly outlined with delicate carmine, suggestive of its early destruction, and then—our luncheon. It had been daintily prepared, and was formed of all the cunning little luxuries that go to make up a delicious little repast; still, it held not half the charm for us as did the wild tangle of woodland that environed our "camp" (as Madge had insisted on calling our impromptu dining-hall). And surely we did resemble a set of wild aborigines as, a few hours later, we congregated around a huge "bonfire" that crackled and snapped right merrily, sending up long, long, lurid tongues of flame and a pale film of smoke that wound, spiral-like, up from the crimson pile below. Little Madge had nestled up close to me, her usually pink cheeks scarlet, from the intense heat sent out by the bright, merciless flames, her arms loosely clasped around her knees and her blue eyes fixed with "look intent" on the logs and branches that were slowly burning out. The soft, golden curls had been tied down by a pale blue scarf, and altogether she presented a pretty little picture, with the dark clump of pines behind her for a background. Poor Royal was on a constant turn, endeavoring to dry his still saturated clothing, as Miss Grey had finally succeeded in persuading him to take off his coat and hang it on a pole that one of the boys had arranged; but he was dreadfully conscious of this missing portion of his apparel, and could not be induced to take part in the merry chatter that the rest of us were indulging in. Le Baron was seated near me, trying to shield my face with a huge leaf from the scorching heat; and Madame C. was frantically endeavoring to poise a corn-popper over the flames, and at the same time to cover her hot little cheek with her one remaining hand, while a daub of smut quite half an inch square adorned her aquiline nose. The other half dozen of us were scattered here

and there, some humming snatches of song and others telling quiet jokes in their own particular corner; if there was such a thing in that circle. Presently some one suggested the sun was fast sinking and we had not yet seen our "chateau." The leaf dropped from Le Baron's hand, and once more I thought I discerned the melancholy expression flit over the fine features, and then I grew angry with myself for my weakness. Chattering like so many magpies, we made our way to the outer gate, which inclosed the grand old grounds adjacent to the object of our pilgrimage. It swung slowly back, creaking uneasily on its huge hinges, and its ponderous ironwork was incrustured with years of corroding rust. It was Le Baron who opened it, and this time I was not mistaken—his hand trembled violently and his face was ashy white. I turned quickly to him—"You are not well, Baron. Let us remain here; and see," I cried, thinking to divert him from continuing our inspection, "there is a lovely bunch of 'golden-rod,' just over there, precisely what I want to mingle with my autumn leaves."

In an instant he had left my side, and a moment later the golden-rod had nestled snugly down by my russet-colored leaves.

"A pretty and thoughtful little device, Miss Eloise," he said, smiling, and showing the strong, pearly teeth; "but you see I am very willful and equally well," he added in his grave voice. Oh! what a lovely place it had been—it was even yet, though rank decay had made rapid strides among all its loveliness; though the downy-leaved roses that had gemmed the hedges with their glowing beauty had faded and drooped, shivering out their short, young lives in autumn's frosty zephyrs, though desolation had stalked unchecked alike through grounds, lawns and terraces, leaving everywhere traces of his grimy fingers—it was still beautiful. The wide court was a tangle of myrtle and frost-tinged ivy, while champions and ragged robins formed thickets of reddish bloom, and the iris leaves stood like lances flaunting their blossoms of gold.

"Ellie! Ellie! Do you see that?" It was little Madge that spoke, and I looked down to see her large eyes riveted

upon one of the arched windows, that gleamed down to us through the network of trees. Ellie, she whispered, "I saw a light flash by that window and—and then—a face—I know it, she exclaimed, "don't think me silly, Ellie." I smiled incredulously and slipped my arm through her's. "Those ghost stories at our "camp" made too deep an impression upon you, little girl; the light, *sans chonte*, you really saw was a reflection of the last 'sunbeam' upon the window-pane, and—and—the face," I continued, at a loss for an explanation to allay her fears, "was simply a very fanciful suggestion of that busy little brain of yours." She seemed re-assured, and we made our way to the portal, which, somewhat to my surprise, though I said nothing, stood ajar. As we entered the long hallway (contrary to the usual cold drafts of air in such unfrequented places), a warmth and glow seemed to permeate the atmosphere, and I was heartily glad, for my teeth were chattering, and my

hands quite numb with cold. It was almost dark, and as we groped our way up the long, winding stair, it suddenly occurred to me that in order to see in such a place one would be obliged to have a light (even though it was still dim daylight outside), and Madge's words came to me, but I immediately put them aside, and reproached myself severely for my childishness. "It's not quite as horrible as I thought, Ellie," said little Madge, as, after wandering through a labyrinth of corridors and angles, we had ended by coming abruptly upon what was once a handsomely-furnished salon. "See," she continued, "is it not exquisitely furnished? Why, it makes me feel quite at home," and, flying to the center of the room, she assumed so well, and with so great an amount of gravity, the rôle "La Chatelean" welcoming her guests, that we burst into merry peals of laughter.

(TO BE CONCLUDED.)





Nurse Margaret.

LEIGH NORTH.

MARGARET, what are you doing?" "Nothing." The girl sat solitary in the midst of the brightly

lighted room. The rays of the chandelier fell directly on her head. She wore a black lace waist cut square, with full sleeves, through which the beautiful arms seemed to gleam. The finely shaped hands lay lightly clasped in her lap. The dark hair, deep set eyes, the oval face, the full lips and chin were motionless as that of a statue; the clinging drapery of her skirt fell in soft folds around her.

Margaret Seaton had "a genius for doing nothing," one of her admirers had said. Perhaps that consisted in the fact that she seldom looked more beautiful.

"It seems to me you are always doing nothing," the voice from the adjoining room proceeded a little irritably; but there was no response.

A visitor, entering, paused at the door and gazed unseen through the parted curtain at the statuesque figure before him. He could almost have cursed his folly in coming again, for, only the day before, Margaret Roland had refused to marry him. Decidedly, almost peremptorily, as he had urged his suit, she would never marry him, and he knew it, yet he could not keep away.

She raised her eyebrows in surprise as he entered. "Why did you come?"

"Because I am an idiot, I suppose."

She did not want him, and determined to punish him for his intrusion, "Grandma, here is Mr. Percival, no doubt he will be charmed to play backgammon with you."

The old lady hustled in from the adjoining room and extended her hand cordially. "So glad to see you. Margaret is such stupid company when she has one of her quiet fits. Do you like backgammon?"

A black look had crossed his face as the younger woman spoke. Now he replied, with conventional politeness, "Of course I should be charmed to have a game with you, Mrs. Seaton," and for a few moments nothing was heard but the rattle of

the dice as the game proceeded. An amused smile rested on Margaret's face, and then she relapsed into her former train of thought.

A heavy step was heard in the hall and another guest entered. A large man, with clustering dark curls, slightly silvered, a keen eye, and a striking, if scarcely handsome, face. A subtle change had come over the quiet figure in the center of the room. Looking at her now you would have called her a woman, not a girl, and it seemed as if there was a sudden, quivering unrest under the outer calm.

The old lady sprang up from her game with extended hands. "So glad to see you, Dr. Ray; why, it's quite an age since you were here." He passed the younger with almost a careless nod, and shook hands warmly with the elder.

"I'm so glad you came in; it was the old complaint; Margaret is such stupid company when she has one of her quiet fits."

The color rose in Margaret's face.

"Why don't you amuse the old lady," he said, almost authoritatively. "Why, you haven't even a piece of fancy work. You're the idlest woman I know."

"I hate backgammon," she said, as if in excuse.

"That makes no difference. We all have to do things we don't like sometimes for other people's sake. You should learn to like it," and he turned back to Mrs. Seaton.

"Cub!" thought Percival, angrily; "why don't you snub that fellow, as he richly deserves, and you are perfectly capable of doing?" he said, when he was released at last, and drew near Margaret.

"I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself, at least, and neither need suggestion nor assistance, thank you," she answered, coldly.

"You would not permit me to speak so to you."

"I certainly should not."

She was not in a peaceable humor, and in the end her visitor did as she desired, and went away.

Presently she took a book and sat down

in a corner by the mantel. The other two chatted and played on for some time. At last the old lady became visibly tired, sleepy, and finally withdrew. The doctor stayed on; he came and stood beside the mantel, and bent his keen gaze on the reader; her eyelids quivered, but she did not look up.

"Are you hurt or offended at my plain speaking? You are so accustomed to those who prophesy smooth things that you cannot bear a word of truth."

"I am not offended," she said, without raising her eyes. Then, suddenly, "What would you have me do? Do you wish me to take in washing?"

He laughed as his eye rested on the white, shapely hands. "They are not so ill adapted to the purpose as some I have seen."

"Yes, they are not small," she admitted, looking at them critically; "but you have not answered my question."

"What were you thinking about when I came in?" he asked, irrelevantly.

"I did not know you observed me."

"Yes, I often observe more than I am supposed to, and," slowly, "I saw something worth looking at. But what were you thinking of?"

"I do not know that I care to say."

"Tell me," he persisted, "a doctor is the best sort of a father confessor, next to a clergyman."

"Well," reluctantly, "I was wondering why I had ever married."

"Why did you?"

"To please my grandmother, as much as anything, though you think I do not consider her."

"Well, at any rate, you are none too generous to your admirers now. I quite congratulated myself that I was not in that fellow's place this evening."

"One could not imagine you in his place."

"Why?"

"For several reasons."

"Well, good night, Madame Rowland. I suppose I have kept you up an unconscionable time."

She bowed.

"Good night, Dr. Ray."

He took her hand for a moment and passed out.

At sixteen, Margaret Seaton had married

a man who was chosen for her. Later she often asked herself why? but could never satisfactorily answer the question. She had not disliked him; she had even had a mild kind of regard for him, and fate had parted them ere an ill-assorted union had proved irksome to either. But as time went on, Margaret could not forgive herself that she had ever agreed to a loveless marriage. She felt almost as if she had committed a crime, and resolved that whatever the sins of Margaret Seaton had been, Margaret Rowland, if she ever married again, should not a second time thus err.

"Margaret, I can't forgive you." It was a few days after, and Margaret was again entertaining a guest. This time it was a woman. "Yes?" she answered, interrogatively. "I had a talk with Hugh Percival yesterday, and I am sure, though he did not tell me, that you have thrown him over."

"If Mr. Percival goes to you for sympathy in any of his misfortunes, real or supposed, it is not my affair; but neither you nor he have any right to accuse me of throwing over a man whom I have never encouraged. I am not likely ever to marry again. As to this particular man, I do not love him, and shall not marry him or any other man whom I do not love."

"Dear me, how romantic for a person of your experience! Now, if I were to talk so it would sound more natural. I do hope, Margaret, you are not going to marry that rude Dr. Ray. He was so brusque to me one day that I can't bear him."

Margaret with difficulty controlled an impulse to answer differently, and said, quietly, "I have no idea of marrying Dr. Ray, but I consider him one of the noblest men I know—so don't run him down."

"Everyone to her taste," said Adele Bruce, with a slight shrug. "If you hear I've caught Percival's heart in the rebound, you need not be surprised. Au revoir," and she took her departure.

Rufus Ray had enthusiastic admirers, and the reverse. He had been styled "Rude Ray" by the latter. The former called him "a royal fellow," while he went on his way unmoved by the judgment of either. Direct and almost brusque in

address, he abhorred all shams and pretenses, and sacrificed sometimes the minor courtesies of life to his love of truth and plain speaking. He was devoted to his profession, and already acquiring a high reputation. His bright, cheery manner brought new hope to many a darkened chamber, and with real sickness and suffering he could be as gentle and tender as a woman.

Mrs. Seaton was an old friend of his mother's, and she was very fond of him, while he was unusually courteous and attentive to her. The old lady, affectionate, warm-hearted and impulsive, expressing her feelings of pleasure or annoyance without hesitation or restraint, found nothing to condemn in the doctor's manner to herself, and was ready to fight his battles on all occasions.

Her granddaughter was even more dear to her; but they differed in opinion on many subjects, and Margaret's impassive manner had an irritating effect on her grandmother.

Margaret's acquaintance with Dr. Ray was of more recent date. He deemed her self-centered, if not selfish, and too much interested in the frivolities of life, grudgingly admitted her beauty, and tried to defend himself against a growing interest in her.

"I can't see why you dislike Rufus Ray so much," Mrs. Seaton would say. The idea was of her own conjuring, but Margaret never corrected it. "For my part, I think he is worth half a dozen of the other young men you have hanging around."

"I fancy my good opinion is not necessary to him."

"A giddy girl's? No, I should think not," fumed the old lady.

"I am neither very giddy, nor exactly a girl," smiled Margaret. Then she thought to herself, with a touch of bitterness, that verily her opinion, good or bad, mattered to him not at all.

It was some time later that Adele Bruce came to her and said, "Congratulate me, my dear, I have caught Percival's heart, or possibly, more strictly speaking, his hand; but it is all one to me, in the rebound, and I have accepted the honor that you declined."

Margaret looked grave. "Jealous, my

dear? Why, I did not expect that of you! Had you supposed he would mourn broken hearted for the rest of his days?" Margaret put the pleasantry aside with a slight frown. "Adele, do you love him?" The latter shrugged her shoulders. "Enough to marry him, French fashion, I fancy."

"Don't do this thing," said Margaret, earnestly, "it seems like a desecration."

"Ah, my dear, you are too romantic for me now. I am only just as romantic as you were at sixteen; but I see I must go elsewhere for good wishes."

"Margaret," said Mrs. Seaton, discontentedly, when she heard of this engagement, "I think you might have had that Mr. Percival yourself, and he was a very nice fellow."

"I suppose I might," answered Margaret, quietly.

"I have concluded I would like to go off for a little trip," the old lady continued. "It's time we left the city. I thought of taking Clara Vaughn with me; the child looks rather pale, as if a change would do her good."

"That is a kind thought of yours, grandmother, and if Clara is with you of course you will not need me. I do not care to go away at present."

"What on earth do you want to stay for? You never want to go when I do," the old lady said, a little sharply; but at heart she was satisfied with the arrangement.

Dr. Ray, when consulted, approved of the plan, and even urged Margaret to accompany the party; but she gently and firmly put aside the suggestion. "You ought to have gone, too," he said, coming in a few evenings later and finding her alone; "there is a good deal of sickness about," and he threw himself rather wearily into a seat.

"You work too hard; you'll make yourself ill," a shade of anxiety betrayed itself in her voice as she spoke.

"Not so much tired as harassed. I've lost my best nurse at the hospital, and don't know where to get another, while new cases are coming in constantly, so that it is very hard to be short-handed. She was a treasure, for she did just as she was bid, which the half of them won't," and he sighed impatiently.

"Let me try and take her place; at least I can have that virtue."

"You!" Words could not express the astonishment and incredulity of his tone.

"Try me," the voice was entreating, "I am strong and more capable than you believe. You shall not have to give me an order twice."

The new nurse at the Wheaton Hospital, in her white cap and apron, was a stately and noble figure. She entered on her work with an ardor and determination that soon conquered all difficulties. The touch of her firm but gentle hand seemed to impart something of her own vitality, and to soothe the severest pain. Physician and patient alike leaned upon her quiet strength, and in the most serious cases no one was more in demand than "Nurse Margaret."

"Verily you have found your vocation," Dr. Ray said, in some amaze. And she smiled gravely as she went about her various tasks, or waited, with the same statuesque grace which had distinguished her in the past, for final directions or orders.

"Rufus Ray, what is this new fad my granddaughter has got into her head?" wrote Mrs. Seaton when she learned of the matter. "A woman with money, and position, and a beautiful home! Why does she need to go out nursing? I depend on you to put a stop to it."

"I will watch her and see that she don't go too far," wrote the doctor soothingly, in his turn. "She is only taking a few lessons in an art for which," burst out the young man, "she has a positive genius."

"Fiddle faddle," grumbled the old lady, when she read the words, "There was one fool said she had a genius for doing nothing." But in her heart she was consoled by his assurance that he would watch Margaret, and proud of the golden opinions she had won.

The days lengthened, the heat grew stronger, doctors and nurses were at their posts, with tense nerves and anxious hearts, wrestling with a grave disease; an epidemic which threatened to sweep all before it, and taxed their skill, ability and endurance to the utmost, ere the battle was won. Scenes of sorrow and suffering, such as she had never known, a wider and more serious world than she had ever realized, opened before Margaret.

"Send Margaret to me," wrote Mrs. Seaton to Dr. Ray, growing more and more impatient; "I can do nothing with herself, but you are on the spot, and can have more influence. I feel sure she is killing herself."

One day the doctor surprised his nurse sitting alone in a little ante-room. Had he grown callous in the midst of so much suffering that he had failed to notice how it was telling on her? The unusual pallor, the black circles round her eyes, the whole listless droop of the figure. She roused herself at his entrance, but he had comprehended all at that glance.

"This must stop, and at once!"

"Not yet; I can't be spared yet," she murmured.

"Words cannot express the gratitude I owe you, for your noble assistance." Her face glowed. "But I have been blind not to see the cost. I entreat, I command you, to desist," and with a quick, decided motion he removed cap and apron. "See, I have brought you back to the old world." Still she protested.

"Margaret, let the truth be between us. For love of me, if I read aright, you have done this thing; for love of me you must forsake it. My heart, my life, is in your hands; an angel has won them," and, taking her hand, he drew her to his side.

"And now, little grandmother, cease your reproaches about my ill looks," said Margaret, when the two were together soon after, and she kissed the old lady with unwonted tenderness. "I know you will be pleased when I tell you I am going to marry your pet, Dr. Ray, next week, and go away with him for rest and change."

Mrs. Seaton's astonishment and delight were great, and she embraced her tall granddaughter with enthusiasm.

It was hard to reconcile her to so quiet, if speedy, a wedding; but both Rufus and Margaret were set upon it, and in the end he carried his point, as he usually did. And her satisfaction at the union was so great that it overcame minor considerations.

"After all, I suppose it was that tomfoolery about 'Nurse Margaret' that settled the matter," said the old lady, reflectively.